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BRIGHSTONE SERMONS

BRIGHSTONE SERMONS

By GEORGE MOBERLY, D.C.L

BISHOP OF SALISBURY

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RIVINGTONS
London, Oxford, and Cambridge
1869

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To the Parishioners of Brighstone

ISLE OF WIGHT

THESE PLAIN SERMONS

PREACHED IN THEIR PARISH CHURCH

AND CONTAINING IT IS HOPED

NOTHING BUT THE SIMPLE GOSPEL AS TAUGHT FROM THE BEGINNING IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Are affectionately Dedicated

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Except a Man be born again

ST. JOHN iii.

3. *Jesus answered and said unto him, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*
4. *Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?*
5. *Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

MANY of you, no doubt, brethren, remember this very important chapter, the third of St. John, the first sixteen verses of which have been read to you this morning as the Gospel for Trinity Sunday. It is the great chapter which speaks of Holy Baptism, and that is the reason why it was chosen as the Gospel for the day. For the last command of Christ before He ascended into heaven was, that the Apostles should go and teach all nations the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and baptize them into it. So that the Name of the Father, the Son, and the

Holy Ghost—that is, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity—and Christian baptism, are very closely joined together. You remember how Nicodemus came to the Lord by night. He was much struck by His miracles, and felt sure that He must be come from God to teach men some great things, or else God would never have given Him the power to perform them. But he was afraid of the Jews. So he came cautiously and secretly; very desirous to hear what the Lord had to say, but very desirous also that the Jews, especially the other Jewish rulers, should not know of his coming; and no doubt you remember how suddenly, how abruptly, and how unexpectedly the Lord began His discourse. He waited for no questions. He did not ask what Nicodemus wished to learn or know, but he began at once by saying, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." I daresay Nicodemus expected something very different from this. May be he thought that the Lord would be flattered by a secret nightly visit from one of the rulers of the people. Perhaps he expected some learned discourse or argument, something about which he too would have much to say, and which he might go away and ponder at his leisure. But he seems to have been quite astonished at this strange and sudden beginning, and asked in utter surprise, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time

into his mother's womb, and be born?" There seems to me to be something like scorn, something that sounds as if the "ruler in Israel" was somewhat offended at the strange words which he had heard. But the Lord did not withdraw a syllable, or soften what He had said. On the contrary, with those solemn words which always betoken something extremely weighty and important, He repeated, with a remarkable variation of the expression, what he had said before, "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." We are not told how Nicodemus received these further startling words. No further answer of his is recorded by St. John, except that he said again, with extreme surprise, "How can these things be?" But we know that he who first came secretly and by night to be taught by our Lord, and whose first lesson in the school of Christ was this startling lesson of Christian baptism, ere long was earnest enough to come forward in the Jewish Council as a defender of Christ from the unjust attacks of the other rulers, and when the Lord was dead upon the cross, came among the foremost of the mourners, no longer secretly, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight, to embalm His body. The discourse on Christian baptism, spoken to him that night, laid the foundation in him of a brave,

unshrinking faith, which, we may well believe, carried him through the rest of his earthly life, and beyond his earthly life to paradise.

But we must return to our Lord's words, which were spoken as much to us as to Nicodemus, and may by His grace become as blessed to us as they were to him: "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*"

Now, in the first place, I wish to assure you that our Lord is here speaking of Christian baptism, and of nothing but Christian baptism; and I also wish to assure you, that for a great many hundreds of years after He spoke these words, no Christian ever doubted that He spoke them of Christian baptism. It is, as you know, more than eighteen hundred years since that time, and for fifteen hundred of these years no Christians ever entertained the least doubt that the Lord spoke of Christian baptism, and that the new birth which alone could give any person entrance into the kingdom of heaven was given by *water* and the *Spirit;* not without the water, which He ordained that men should use for this sacred purpose; and not without the Spirit, which He would give whensoever that water was duly used for that sacred purpose by men. It was Christ who bound the water and the Spirit together to work this

great work of regenerating souls. If He had given it only by the Spirit without the water, we should never have known for certain who had the gift and who had not. We should be liable to make all sorts of very fatal mistakes about it. Often good and modest and timid people would be thrown into sad trouble and misery because they could not feel sure that they had got it. Still more often, bold people, and self-confident people, and people of hot, enthusiastic minds, would deceive themselves so far as to think that their own fancy, or the heat of their own feelings, was really the working of the Holy Spirit within them. Often people who at one time had felt sure and happy and certain of their new birth of the Holy Spirit, would be thrown back into uneasiness and despair because they found their feelings less easy and their hearts feeling harder, and would vex themselves in the saddest and most melancholy way, thinking that they had either been deceiving themselves before, or, still worse, that the Holy Spirit had been taken away from them again, and so that they were worse, and their case still more hopeless than ever. O brethren, thanks be to God that He has not left us thus to the dominion of mere inward feelings and fancies on such a very important matter as this; but while He alone gives the Holy Spirit of the new birth, and none but He can give it, He yet promises

that His gift of the Holy Spirit shall not fail to go along with the due administration of the water in the sacrament of baptism.

Will any one tell me that he cannot believe that the sprinkling of a little water on the forehead of a child or of a grown person can produce such wonderful effect as to regenerate his soul? No, surely, *of itself* it cannot. When John the Baptist poured water on the heads of the people who flocked to him in Jordan, that water did not regenerate their souls. But he himself pointed out the difference. I indeed, he said, baptize you with water—nothing but water—but He that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose, He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

Will any one still say that he cannot believe that the sprinkling of a little water on the forehead of a child or grown person can have so wonderful effect as to regenerate the soul? What! not if Christ has ordered it, and if God has promised to bind His invisible gift with the visible ordinance? Do you not remember the story of Naaman the Syrian, who came to the prophet Elisha to be cured of his leprosy? Do you not remember how foolish and angry he was when the prophet told him to go and wash in Jordan seven times, and his flesh should come again to him and he should be clean?—how he

quarrelled, and dissented, and argued, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?" And how he turned and went away in a rage? Can you not imagine how he would have disputed and said, "How *can water* cleanse my leprosy? Have I not washed in *water* a thousand times? And why should I wash in Jordan, rather than in my own beautiful rivers at Damascus? And why seven times? Why not once? Why not twenty times?"

But Naaman was wise enough to listen to his servants, when they urged him and said, "My father, if the Prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith unto thee, Wash, and be clean." So he "went down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

Happy Naaman, who gave up his arguments and his conceit, and his own independent notions, and went and did simply what the Prophet bade him. And happy Nicodemus, who yielded up all his difficulties and objections, and humbly accepted what One greater than Elisha taught him of the new birth of water and the Spirit! And happy we, if we receive the Lord's own

blessed words as they were spoken, and when we take our children to be baptized in the Church of God, and when we recall the fact of our own baptism, do not doubt that with the administration of the sacred water the inward birth of the Holy Ghost, the seed of the Divine life, was by Christ Himself planted in our souls!

Yes, brethren, the seed, the beginning, the birth,—but let no person confound the seed with the fruit, nor the beginning with the end, nor the birth with the maturity. Blessed be God who gave us, when we were baptized, that assured birth of water and the Holy Ghost. But where are we now? How far have we gone on to cultivate and improve that blessed seed, to grow on in holiness and devotion to God since that blessed birth?

The little child just christened, with the sacred water of baptism still glistening on its forehead, if God should be pleased to call it away in its first infancy, and take it to Himself, we may be quite certain (and Christain fathers and mothers feel unspeakable comfort in that certainty) that such a child, regenerate by water and the Holy Ghost, is a true member of Christ, a child of the Father's love, and a certain heir of the heavenly kingdom.

What shall we say of the boy or girl, spared to live on a few years, and beginning to know something of the

naughtiness of the world, and of their own liking for things which are wrong and sinful? Shall we not watch them with ten times the care, and feel very much more anxious about them, if we remember that in each of these young baptized hearts there is the seed of the Holy Spirit of God, and that according as they grow up in purity and obedience and faith, so the precious seed grows stronger in them, and that if they grow up in wilful wicked ways the same precious seed grows weaker, and threatens to die away utterly out of their souls? I do not know anything which gives to those of us who have the charge of children so keen and true a sense of the extreme importance of the talent which God has put into our keeping, as the remembrance that in their souls is the seed, the spark, the beginning of the life of the Holy Spirit, and that as they are bred up in their youth, and learn to be good and faithful and holy, or the reverse, so the Holy Spirit within them is either growing or decaying in their souls.

And what shall we think, brethren, we who are older, of ourselves? It is long since we received, by the infinite mercy of God, that great gift. Years have passed by,—many to some of us,—since God gave us that seed of eternal life, the birth of the Holy Ghost. How do we fare now? When we think how He has been present with us, knowing all our most secret

thoughts, when we were boys, when we were young men, as we grew, some of us, to be old men, what can we think of ourselves, and of the growth of that Holy Spirit in our hearts? What thoughts of sin has He witnessed? what words has He heard? what deeds has He known of? Each has his separate recollections, and some are no doubt darker and more melancholy than others.

But I will venture to say, brethren, and to say it with perfect confidence and certainty, that even now—be the case with any one ever so sad and melancholy—there is time to turn, time to repent, time to waken up to fresh life and vigour the life of the Holy Spirit within us. Why does God spare us? Why do we live on? Why are we allowed to hear continually of His love and mercy, and to receive invitations, time after time, to turn and close with them? Do you think He would mock you with a call you cannot hear, and an invitation you cannot accept? Be the reed ever so bruised, you know well that *He* will not break it, but bind it, and strengthen and support it, provided it *will* be supported. Be the spark in the smouldering flax ever so feeble, yet if it will invite His kindling help, He will fan it into a strong and holy flame, provided it will be fanned, and will lend itself to the flame. O brethren, be not deceived; be not misled. This is our present struggle. This is what the Holy Spirit in our

hearts still maintains, and what the angels of God witness:—whether, that is you and I, you, Christian brother or sister, and I, will give up our own sin and worldliness and clinging to things that are vain and earthly, and yield ourselves up with all our heart to be led by the Good Spirit of Grace, or no. Thank God! our certainty does not depend upon our own feelings, which ebb to and fro in all sorts of wild ways, and sometimes would make us too confident, and sometimes too despairing. Thank God! for He first bound His secret gift which we could not see to the outward administration of water which we could see. Thank God! that He still binds His secret gifts of communion with Himself to outward means and signs about which we can have no doubt. Thank God! for He has given us all these many assurances of His love and favour. And O! thank God, thank God from the bottom of our hearts, if He enable us to see some signs of our growth in grace by the presence of these fruits of the Spirit which He has bidden us look for: if we are really growing in faith, in pureness, in humble modesty, in earnestness of prayer, in practical and real obedience.

But this is what is needed: and this, brethren, we must by God's grace come to before we die, if we desire to be His sons in Christ at the last as we were made His sons in Christ at the first.

The Lord with the Doctors

St Luke ii.

41. *Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover.*

42. *And when He was twelve years old they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.*

OWING to the fact that the Feast of the Epiphany fell this year upon a Monday, we are a week behindhand in preaching upon the Epiphany subjects. The event of our Lord's being carried to Jerusalem at twelve years old formed the subject of last Sunday's Gospel, while to-day's Gospel has gone on to the next manifestation, the changing of the water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee.

But we must not lose, particularly in this year, when we are hoping to take our young people to the Bishop for Apostolic confirmation, the lesson given to us by our Blessed Lord, when at twelve years old He went up with His mother and Joseph to Jerusalem, according to the narrative of St. Luke.

It was at twelve years old that Jewish boys came personally under the obligations of the law of Moses. Up to that age they had been treated as children, taught by their parents at home, but not yet expected to obey the harder precepts, such as fasting, or attending at Jerusalem at the three great feasts of the year. But at twelve years old they were called "Sons of the Law," or "Sons of the Precept," and this signified that they now entered upon the second stage of life, and were no longer mere children. Henceforth they were old enough to have knowledge of their own, and to obey for themselves.

It was usual, too, that at that age they should be questioned by teachers of the law in order to ascertain whether they had been properly brought up and educated in their religion so far by their parents.

When, then, He was come to this age, Joseph and Mary, who had gone regularly up to Jerusalem in the former years by themselves, took, for the first time, their wonderful Child with them, not doubting that in this as in everything else it was their duty to fulfil all righteousness,—that is, to obey all the rules and orders of the law of God under which they lived. You remember, I have no doubt, how they came, how they stayed through the feast, how they began their journey home in the large caravan of their kinsfolk and acquaint-

ance, who travelled together for society and protection in the long and somewhat dangerous journey back into Galilee, and how it was not till the end of the first day's journey that they missed Him, and then turned back to Jerusalem in anxiety and distress to search for Him. Still they had to seek for three days without success, and then at last they found Him in the temple,—in one of the chambers, probably, connected with the temple, —sitting on a lower seat as a disciple or catechumen, in the midst of the doctors (and we know that the doctors or rabbis of that generation were an unusually learned and able set of teachers), both hearing them, listening to their instruction, and asking them questions, that is to say, making further inquiries on the matters which they explained. We are not told what the particular subjects of these questions and answers were, but it is not unreasonable to think, as is suggested by many ancient writers, that He asked them about the prophecies of the Messiah's coming, and led them, meekly, and as one that was learning, while in fact He was teaching, to explain how the time had arrived for the Saviour to be born, and for the long-promised redemption and consolation of Israel to be manifested to mankind. There were many listeners, astonished, we are told, at the understanding He displayed, and the knowledge of the law and the prophets which were seen in His answers

to the catechizing of the learned rabbis. "And when they saw Him, they were amazed, and His mother said unto Him, Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." Observe the mixed respect and remonstrance of the Virgin-Mother. Knowing as she did something, but not all, of His greatness, and amazed to see the astonishment of the rabbis and the bystanders at His extraordinary understanding and answers, yet she could not refrain from giving some expression to the mother's distress and pain at the recollection of her four days of anxious misery. And remark, too, the delicacy of feeling with which she speaks of Joseph, calling him, so to speak, by his family name of "father,"—that she may not seem to be selfish in her grief, but acknowledge the sympathy and help of him who had assisted her in her search, and who felt not less than a father's love, and the deep reverence of a pious Jew, towards his wife's Divine Child.

"And He said unto them, How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"

Perhaps there is a slight, hardly perceptible check or rebuke in these last words, as though He meant to say, Do not say My Father. You might have known, you should have remembered, that I had My own Father's

business, God the Father's Divine business in hand. Your anxiety was tender, loving, and affectionate. But I was called to higher things, and have been engaged in them. "And they understood not the saying which He spake unto them."

So ends, so simply and shortly told, the narrative of the Lord's manifestation to the doctors in Jerusalem when He was twelve years old. And the history continues—"He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them."

We know very well, brethren, that besides the one great blessing which we receive from our Lord's life on earth,—I mean the blessing of His sacrifice by which He atoned to His Father for the sins of all mankind, by shedding His most precious blood for us on the Cross,—we know, I say, that all His life, from His cradle to His grave, was designed to be the very model and example by which we are to frame our lives. He pleased God altogether as a child, and we, as children, are to learn to please God by being such as He was. He pleased God altogether as a boy, and we, when we are boys, are to learn to please Him in the same way. As a young man, before He entered upon the main business of His life, He was a model to young men. As a man full grown and busy in His holy work till He died, He is the perfect example to all men of that which

God loves, and intends them to copy:—of meekness, love, devotion, purity, prayer, and obedience, perfect in life and perfect unto death.

Now the special lesson of the narrative of which I have been speaking is, I suppose, addressed to young people, to boys and girls, and to their parents for their sakes. There are some lessons in it, no doubt, for us all; but the particular lesson is for them, and most particularly for those who are old enough to be confirmed.

Observe, then, first, that when the Lord is old enough, there is no question at all on the part of Mary and Joseph as to whether He shall be brought to Jerusalem for Jewish confirmation. They do not doubt at all about it. They do not ask, as we sometimes hear it asked,—What is the good of it? They do not say, We do not see how a person is any the better for it, or any the worse without it. No; they simply came at the due time to Jerusalem, and bring the Heavenly Child with them, to fulfil all righteousness in being confirmed, as He had fulfilled it at eight days' old by being circumcised, and as He fulfilled it at thirty years' old by receiving John's baptism in the Jordan.

Still less did the Holy Child Himself object. He was altogether obedient and dutiful to His mother, and to him who was called His father. No shadow of that wilfulness, and uncorrected disobedience which we see

too often in families, when boys and girls are allowed to do very much as they will, and judge for themselves whether they will do this thing or that, or whether they will refrain from it. So, well taught at home, and far beyond His years in knowledge of Holy Scripture and the doctrines of religion,—remember, parents, that it lies in your hands to see that your children when they are little are taught in like manner to know their Bible, and the doctrine of Christ, and to be early used to prayer, both private at your knee and public in the Church,—the Holy Lord is brought to Jerusalem to be questioned by the learned teachers of the people. Observe how He instantly feels that He is engaged in something higher now even than obedience to His earthly mother. *It is His Father's business!* Obedience to His mother has brought Him there, and fitted Him to come there. But now He is old enough to feel that He is engaged in God's business; in His heavenly Father's business. His brow is loftier. His look is changed. The sweet and dutiful child has become, visibly, the servant and the Son of God.

So I understand the words of the text, which says that they understood not the words which He spake unto them. They found Him altered; not less dutiful nor less sweet and obedient than before; but there was a loftier tone in His duty, and a deeper cause for His

obedience, for He had begun to be, in His own person, a Son of the Law; and the obligation of His heavenly Father's business at once weighed upon His spirit and lifted it up. And I know that common parents like ourselves may sometimes see such things in our own children, when by being confirmed they have passed out of the mere age of children, have taken their own vows publicly before God and the church upon themselves, and have become partakers of the Holy Communion of the Lord's Supper. The little one who was as a plaything when he was quite little; a loving, gentle child in all the early years of childish teaching,—you will find sometimes, if you have done your work well in those early years, that from confirmation your child is not less yours than he was, but visibly more God's,—that he is as dutiful, as loving, as attentive to your least wish—nay, more so than ever he was before,—but there is a loftier element mingled with his love and duty now, for he feels that he has more distinctly undertaken his Father's business,—that the most sacred weapons of the Christian's warfare are put into his hands,—that he is confirmed,—that he is a communicant,—that he is become a responsible man in the Church of God. Observe again, how beautifully the narrative continues. No sooner are we told of the lofty way in which He tells His mother how He was engaged

in His Father's business, and of the change of tone and manner which Mary and Joseph found it so hard to understand, than it goes on to say that He went down to Nazareth and was subject unto them. Observe it well, brethren: just as much subject, just as dutiful as ever. But I apprehend that a change had come over Him. He went up to Jerusalem a child,—He went back to Nazareth, still in years a child,—but in heart, in devotion to His Father's business, a man. He went back, no doubt, to His old occupations, His old recreations, to all the old things which still suited His still childish years, but there mingled with it all that loftier, deeper tone of which I speak,—the like of which a Christian parent loves to see spring up in his own dear boy or girl,—the tone which comes of the consciousness that they have publicly devoted themselves; and seriously intend by God's grace to devote themselves in all their lives to their heavenly Father's business.

I would that those of you, brethren, who are parents, having children old enough to be brought to the Bishop to be confirmed by him according to the direction that was given at their baptism, would remember the godly act of the Blessed Virgin-Mother and Joseph in bringing up their Divine Son to the Jewish Rabbis in Jerusalem; and that you who are children, of the proper age to be confirmed, would remember how the Holy

Lord Himself, who for His own sake needed it not, yet for our sakes, and to give us an example that we might in all points walk in His steps, dutifully came, dutifully answered, and dutifully received the orderly admission of a Jewish boy into the position of a Son of the law.

Such instruction and assistance as we can give in preparation shall, with the blessing of God, be most earnestly and cheerfully given; and I hope to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock to see the girls who desire to be confirmed. For the boys I will give a further notice. And I beg that all will remember that the due confirmation of the young people, by which they are much helped to grow in grace and goodness, is a matter which greatly concerns not the young people only but the whole community in which they live, and the whole church of which they are members: so that all who are —whether as parents, or guardians, or employers—in charge of young people of the proper age, should cause them to come to me and receive such training and preparation as, with the help of God, I may be able to give.

And let us all remember,—those of us, I mean, who are older and have been confirmed ourselves,—that we, too, have to be still engaged in our Heavenly Father's business. We, too, undertook it,—perhaps many years ago. But we undertook it, not for a short time only, to

be forgotten after the first excitement was over, but for life. The obligation of it is on us now, and will be on us, in our different calls and duties of life, as long as God spares us to live upon this earth.

We ought, brethren, to renew this obligation, and to renew the strength to fulfil it with, by constantly partaking of the spiritual food of the Lord's Body and Blood in Holy Communion. And some of us, I trust, do so. I wish the example were more commonly and universally given, so that we might hope that those who by Confirmation are admitted to the Lord's Table should be encouraged by the uniform practice of their fathers and mothers, and elder brothers and sisters, to come regularly to Christ, and strengthen and refresh their souls by constant feeding on that most precious food of life.

For the present, however, I must confine myself to the immediate point which is before me, and beg you, one and all, to do all in your power to help in bringing all the young people of the requisite age to Confirmation, remembering how Mary and Joseph brought their Holy Child, and how that Holy Child obediently came to Jerusalem to be received into the estate of early manhood in the Church of God, and so to begin, in the earnest and deep way of manhood, to be busy with His Father's business.

The Draw-Net

ST. MATTHEW xiii.

47. *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a* net *that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind,*

48. *Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.*

THE thirteenth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel is a storehouse of parables; not less than seven parables, one after another, are recorded in that precious chapter.

In each one of them the *kingdom of heaven* is likened to something that we know familiarly on earth—to the sower sowing his seed on various sorts of soil; to the farmer sowing good seed in his field, and the enemy coming in and sowing poisonous weeds among the corn; to the little mustard-seed spreading into the greatest among herbs; to the leaven which the woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened; to the treasure hid in the field; to the pearl of great price found by the merchantman; and lastly,

to the net cast into the sea, and gathering into it all sorts of fish.

It was the usual custom in Eastern countries to teach in this way by parables; by tales, sometimes fictitious and sometimes real, which conveyed, more or less unawares to the minds of the hearers, the lesson which the teacher intended.

In all these various likenesses it is the kingdom of God, the Church of God, which the Lord describes; sometimes in the variety of the people who belong to it; sometimes in the mixture of good and evil in it; sometimes in the smallness of its beginning and its wonderful increase; sometimes in the silent spreading of its doctrines and examples; sometimes in the precious value of belonging to it and possessing its privileges; sometimes in the separation of good and evil which is to take place at the last.

This morning I propose to confine our attention to the last of these. The kingdom of heaven, that is, the Church of God, is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered fish of every kind.

It is not an uncommon image in Holy Scripture; fishers of men; a net; mending of nets; a great sweeping to the net of all kinds of fish. The Lord was probably on the banks of the great Lake or Sea of Galilee. His Apostles, who surrounded Him, were many of them

fishermen. He taught them by speaking of things which they all understood. You remember that when He first called the two brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew, He found them at their usual work, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen, and He saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. All this explains and illustrates His meaning when He says that the kingdom of God is like unto a net.

Another time—twice, indeed, the same thing happened and in the same place—when they had toiled all the night and had caught nothing, He bade them let down their nets again for a draught, and by His blessing, when they had taken no fish for many hours, then all at once their net enclosed a great multitude of fish, so that they were afraid that it would break with the weight.

The great net mentioned in the parable is a large hauling, or draw-net, such an one as needs the use of a boat. Fish abounded, as they still abound, in the Sea of Galilee—fresh-water fish—and there were a great many fishing-boats on the water, which supplied a considerable part of the food of the inhabitants of the neighbouring country. The nets which Peter and Andrew were casting into the sea from the shore were what we call *casting-nets*, which folded upon the left arm, and, spread widely by a skilful cast of the right arm, then

sink to the bottom of the shallower water, and enclose all the fish that are within their circuit.

Either way, the fishermen represent the clergy; first the Apostles, and after them the clergymen, their successors. As fishermen toil to catch fish night and day, so must they toil, and the fish are the souls of men. As Peter and Andrew used to cast their casting-nets from the shore, or let down their draw-nets or seines from their boat, when they used to fish for fish in the Sea of Galilee, so when they became Apostles they fished for the souls of men. Peter, at Antioch and in Rome; Andrew, in Scythia, Asia Minor, and Greece, used every art, by preaching, by teaching, by warning, by winning, to bring men and women to believe in Jesus Christ, and to come into the good net of the Church by being baptized in water.

Christians were spoken of as fishes, born in the water of holy baptism, and brought into the great net of the Church, and then drawn to the shore at last, and stored in the vessels of God; and the fishermen of souls were taught that all their success in their labour came of God, and that they must not presume upon any supposed skill or industry of their own. As in their experience on the sea they had often toiled all night and taken nothing, so in their fishing for souls they often met with long and bitter disappointment. Men and women would

be perverse, and refuse to believe their Gospel; they would be scornful and careless; or they would love the world so well as to refuse altogether to abandon it; or they would say, What is the good of being baptized? Can we not serve God just as well without? What good can a little water do to us? In many ways it has always been the experience of Christ's faithful clergy, in their fishing for souls, that often and often, and sometimes for very long times together, they seem to lose their labour; they toil day and night, and take nothing. People set themselves against them, and will not come into the great net of the Church. Nevertheless, if they continue to be faithful in their calling, they will never leave off letting down their nets for the draught. They will pray; they will invite others to prayer; they will teach, privately and publicly; they will offer constantly the blessed feast of the Body and Blood of Christ to be the spiritual food of Christian souls. And in God's good time, sooner or later, sometimes suddenly, sometimes after ever so long delay, sometimes, it may be, without their hearts being *ever* gladdened by the actual sight of any certain effect of their spiritual fishing, He will bless their work. But their faithful work is never wasted: it cannot be wasted. Hearts are often touched without showing it. Men and women are often secretly pierced by what they hear; while from all sorts of indi-

rect causes, from fear of other people, from fear of ridicule or scorn, or the dread of old things being thrown in their teeth, they do not like to own it. And it often happens that the secret touch by God's grace is not forgotten, but some other day produces the fruits of repentance and turning to God. The work, I say, cannot be wasted. Even if people are to the end so perverse as not to be won by faithful ministrations, yet the faithful ministrations are full of grace and blessing at least to him who exercises them; and I venture to say that they are very seldom indeed wholly without effect upon those among whom they are exercised, even though there be little or no outward proof of their having been heeded at all. But hearts *have* heard, and some hearts have not forgotten, and some hearts will never forget what has been faithfully, and honestly, and boldly, because truly, spoken among them.

Thus much, brethren, for the present about the fishermen. They must work, and work on, whether the visible effect of their fishing be small or great.

But the fish are the souls of men. And what is to bring them into the net? How are the souls of men to be brought and kept safe in the Church of God? We send out missionaries, bishops with their clergy, into distant lands; there are souls enough, but what shall bring them into the net? We have our clergy at home,

casting their net into the shallower and less dangerous waters, teaching in their separate parishes—and there are souls enough—but what shall bring them, if they have not been brought, and what shall keep them, if they have been brought before, in the blessed net of the Church of Christ?

Observe, throwing the net will not catch the fish, unless the fish will come into the net; preaching and teaching will not bring souls into the Church and keep them there, unless the souls themselves be willing to be brought and desirous to be kept. When the Apostles had toiled all night and taken nothing, but nevertheless, at the word of Christ let down their nets again, and enclosed a great multitude of fishes, what was the cause of the difference? Had they fished unskilfully in the night, and did they do it better and more workmanly in the morning? No, nothing of the kind; their work was as well done at the one time as at the other. The Lord brought the fish to the net, and the Lord it is who ever bringeth the souls to the Church.

When the missionary in distant countries stands beneath a palm-tree, or on a hill, and speaks out the message of the Gospel, what is it that brings the African, or the Hindoo, or the New Zealander to listen to his words? Is it curiosity? is it surprise? Perhaps it is. But God is using the poor heathen's natural

curiosity and his surprise at the white man's words as the first drawing of his soul towards the Church. By and by he will listen more attentively; he will take in the gracious message of the love of God in Christ. The Lord is bringing his soul nearer. He will tell his friends of the white man's wonderful words. The fish will gather more and more thickly round the net. So souls are drawn. After a time they long to hear. They are taught, they learn, they believe. And then at last, like fish of God's own draught, they are new born in the water, the water of Holy Baptism, and are happily landed in the blessed net of the Church.

The case is different with our work in our parishes. In some respects it is easier than that of the missionary, in some it is much harder. With the missionary the difficulty is to get the poor heathen to hear at all. But when that difficulty is once surmounted, and by the grace of God the ears are opened once, the sweet and gracious message of redemption is wont to be received with a degree of hearty faith and devotion which binds the poor convert in soul and body, in life and in death, to the blessed Church to which he has been admitted. But in our parishes the people have all long since heard the message; they were made Christians when they were infants, they have been brought up in the faith; and alas! as they have grown older too many of

them have, as it were, grown tired of it. They stay away without cause from Church. They make new ways for themselves. They do not care much whether they are in the net of God or no. They sometimes live like the very heathen, without God in the world. And I beg you to think, which is likely to be worse in the eyes of God,—a poor African or Hindoo, who, having never heard of Christ, lives in all the foul and uncleansed misery of his fathers,—or a baptized man or woman, who, in a Christian village, and with the means of grace richly furnished to all who are willing to use them, lives in sin and neglect, amid bad words and bad thoughts; in lust, in drink, in malice, in dishonesty, or the like.

Yet, in some sense, they are all in the net. They are Christians. They call themselves so, and they are so. Yes: the net has been cast into the sea, and has gathered of every kind, good and bad. It is as the Lord knew, and as He predicted.

But what shall be the end thereof? The parable tells us plainly. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a great draw-net, that was cast into the sea, and swept up fish of every kind, both good and bad. Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away.

Yes: when the net is full, when the appointed years

are passed, and so many generations of men have been born, and lived and died: when the net has been swept over all lands, and every sea has been searched: when those whom God foreknew have been solicited by the preaching of the Church, and those who have listened to that preaching have been brought into the Church, and God's message has been proclaimed in all the ears of all men,—they shall draw it to shore:—the angels at the Judgment shall be employed by God in the great work of separating the host of the souls of man from one another, two great companies. They shall gather the good into vessels. They shall set the souls that have believed, and repented, and prayed, and drawn near to Christ, and in that faith and that obedience have lived and died, they shall set them upon the Judge's right hand, for glory and eternal life: but the bad they shall cast away, into that terrible outer darkness, that fearful weeping and gnashing of teeth that shall know no end.

O brethren, brought as we all have been into the net, baptized that is into the Church of God,—and prizing, as no doubt we all in a certain sense do, our lot therein, shall we not endeavour, by His Grace, to frame our lives so as to be chosen at the last, so as to be found still in Christ when that awful separation, that terrible sifting comes? It is not by careless living, nor by going on

like our neighbours, nor by neglecting Church, nor by staying away from Holy Communion, nor by inattention to prayers, nor by thinking little about sins, that we can be saved. No: in the Church of Christ, clinging to Christ in faith, proving that faith by works of living love; constant in prayers, both private at home, and public in the Church; feeding on the blessed Body and Blood of Christ in the spiritual feast of Holy Communion—this, and this only, is the way pointed out to us in Holy Scripture, whereby we who have once been brought into the great net of God may at the last be, for His sake, acknowledged as His own.

May God give us His grace to lay it to our hearts in time! while it is yet day; for the night cometh when no man can work. Death cometh, when our trial will be over. May no false teaching, no feeling of foolish independence, no love of sin, keep any of us from giving ourselves up to Christ in body and soul in His Church.

If it may be—and but for our own perverseness and love of evil it surely may be, yes, and it will be—may we, *one and all*, clinging to Christ in His Church in our lives, be found in Him at the last, clothed in His righteousness, accepted for His sake, received as His repentant, forgiven, faithful people to glory unspeakable in Heaven for ever and ever.

I will lay me down in Peace

PSALM iv.

8. *I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest; for it is Thou, Lord, only that makest me dwell in safety.*

THE Book of the Psalms of David has formed part of the worship of God almost, we may believe, from the very time of the building of the Temple at Jerusalem. The Jewish service of the Temple consisted chiefly of portions of it, as the prayers of the modern Jews are taken almost wholly from it. The Christians undoubtedly used it in public service in the times of the Apostles; and in the following ages it was repeated so often at Church, that the most unlearned Christians could say great portions of it by heart to themselves while engaged in their ordinary work.

It is not surprising that the Jews should have prized it so highly, and used it so much: for David was their own great king, the pride of their nation; and their patriotism would naturally lead them even to magnify the

beauty and the value of so precious a store of hymns which he had bequeathed to them.

Perhaps it *is* somewhat surprising, at the first thought, that *Christians* have used it so much: for it is, of course, a Jewish book, and the actual truths of the Gospel are not,—of course, they are not,—expressed in it in plain terms.

But the truth is, that it is a Divine Book, and plainly written,—not perhaps that David himself knew fully what he was doing,—but by the Holy Spirit who bade him write it—for the Christian use and instruction of the Church of God in all ages.

It is a most wonderful book. Perhaps those people who know it only a little, who glance at it now and then only, and do not take the trouble to understand it, may not think so: they think it more or less beautiful, or ancient or curious, but they do not really know how very wonderful and divine it is.

One great feature of it is the way in which, without actually stating, as of course it could not, the actual facts or doctrines of the Gospel, in express terms, it yet indirectly, and as it were under a curtain, refers to them; so that to us, who know them well, it speaks almost as plainly as if it did actually state them in terms.

Take for example the twenty-second Psalm. Not

only did the Lord Himself, by uttering the first words of that Psalm as He hung upon the Cross, bind that Psalm to the subject of the Crucifixion,—but all through, the very words of it are so wonderfully express, that they sound more like a hymn by St. John, describing what he saw when he stood by the Cross, than one of David, predicting, by the Holy Spirit, a thousand years before, what would happen so long afterwards. "They pierced My hands and My feet. I may tell all My bones, they stand staring and looking upon Me. They parted My garments among them, and upon My vesture they did cast lots." How wonderful and how divine is all this! Written, sung, a thousand years before the Crucifixion, and yet describing with such exact minuteness the very things which took place at that time! What wonder, then, that Christians can read in that Divine Psalm, as in others, more than David knew, or the ancient Jews discovered in it, the very truths of the Gospel under a curtain, the very provision of Divine Psalms, prepared by the Holy Spirit of God for their use in every generation?

This is one great thing. But there is another too; namely, that the Psalms form the most wonderful expression of human feelings that was ever penned. Those who only know the Book of Psalms slightly do not understand this. But those who are wise enough to know

them well, to learn them by heart and use them, know well that there is no state of feeling, no condition in life for which that wonderful book does not furnish the most exact and well-fitted expressions that can be conceived or desired. With joy and thankfulness the Psalms, if I may so speak, run over; they are full of faith, and trust, and cheerful confidence in the mercy and goodness of God. Of penitential sorrow and distress for sins, of humble confession and repentance, they are so full, that, when you read them with that view they almost seem to contain nothing else. For peaceful times, for anxious times, for times of affliction and grief, for times when others round about us are in trouble, or are ill-treating or misunderstanding us, for reliance on God in the morning, or in the evening, awake or asleep, at midnight or at mid-day, in solitude or in society,—none know so well as those who use the Psalms, or some of them, by heart, what a store of heavenly expressions they furnish by which Christian hearts may pour themselves out to God in strains the most beautiful, and most exactly suitable to all their various states of feeling and condition. It has been very beautifully said of Holy Scripture in general, and it is I think more applicable to the Psalms than to any other book in it, that its eye follows us, like the eye of a picture, ever fixed upon us turn where we will.

"Eye of God's Word! where'er we turn
Ever upon us! Thy keen gaze
Can all the depths of sin discern,
Unravel every bosom's maze:
Who that has felt thy glance of dread
Thrill through his heart's remotest cells,
About his path, about his bed,
Can doubt what Spirit in thee dwells?"

And so, brethren, I can hardly give, to those who are in earnest to serve God, more useful and practical advice than to urge them to study and learn and use the Book of Psalms. Learn at least some of them by heart: the 3rd Psalm for the morning; the 4th Psalm for the evening; the 130th Psalm for midnight, to say as you lie, it may be, sleepless with pain or painful thoughts upon your bed; the 51st Psalm for Lent, or other times of penitence and distress for sin. Often, as you walk along the road, or over the hills, or are busy with this or that work, the words of one of these heavenly Psalms, I can assure you, will come very sweetly, and very usefully into your mind, and will help you to drive away other thoughts,—I know not what—of discontent, or repining, or unkindness, or worse, which else might find harbour there. Men may think this perhaps idle, or silly, or unpractical sort of talk, to bid them learn Psalms and say them to themselves; for in these cold days men are so worldly and so self-satisfied that they

do not feel the need, or the good, or the pleasure of such things. But Christians in old times used to do these things, and we, brethren, are neither so wise nor so good as they were, and they could say, as David said, "O Lord, how sweet are Thy words unto my throat, yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth." "Thy words have I hid within my heart that I should not sin against Thee." And I will venture to say that after the great duties of Prayer and Holy Communion, there is no method of devotionally keeping the heart and imagination right before God, and squaring our secret thoughts to His will, better or more blessed than thus to hide some of His sacred words within our heart to keep us from sinning against Him. Believe me, there is a much wiser wisdom than the so-called wisdom which is in these days so common and so highly prized among us.

The particular verse which I read to you for the text, and from which I have too long diverged into general considerations, is one of those which I have already referred to, as making the 4th Psalm a special Psalm for the evening. "I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest, for it is Thou, Lord, only that makest me dwell in safety." Night after night we lie down to sleep, we, and all men, and all other creatures that have life. See, brethren, how tenderly and truly this verse of the Psalm teaches us how to go to our sleep. "I will lay me

down *in peace*,"—in peace of conscience, because I have thought over my sins, and confessed them in my prayers to God,—in peace with all my neighbours, because, whatever disputes or quarrels there may have been in the day, I have not allowed the sun to go down upon my wrath,—in peace of mind about earthly things and dangers, because God knows better than I do what is good for me, and is always ready to do for me more than either I desire or deserve,—in peace of mind about spiritual fears, because I know that God is about my bed by night as well as about my path by day, and will give His angels charge concerning me to keep me from all evil. I will lay me down in peace, and *take my rest*, —I will not lie down to indulge evil thoughts, or to do unseemly and evil deeds, but to take my necessary, sweet rest, which may enable me to do my work better and more actively to-morrow morning. "I will lay me down in peace and take my rest, for it is Thou, Lord, only that makest me dwell in safety." Thou, O Lord God, Who hast made me Thy child as a member of Thy Christ; Thou, O Lord God, Whose Holy Spirit condescends to dwell in this weak heart of mine; Thou, and Thou only canst make me sleep in perfect safety and peace. I might resign myself to sleep, as an irrational creature does, sinking into unconsciousness without knowing or thinking what might become of me in my

sleep, or whether I should ever wake again. But I, a Christian, a child of God in Christ, sanctified by His Spirit and guarded by His angels,—I go to sleep in a loftier, nobler, happier way than this. I lay myself, as it were, in God's arms. I feel His presence round me, even, so to speak, more sensibly when as unconsciousness steals over me, I seem to cease to be able to take care of myself. The Lord in whom I trust will take care of me. He will bless me, and make me and mine dwell in safety, as with good provident thought, and full confidence in Him, we welcome the hours of darkness, and resign ourselves to our necessary rest. So, brethren, I would fain advise you to use and dwell upon this verse, evening by evening, ere you lie down to sleep.

But you will readily see that the verse, though applicable thus to the taking of rest in our ordinary nightly sleep, has a still further and higher reference to that more solemn and longer sleep which awaits us all, when it shall be the pleasure of God to call us from this earthly life, and we be laid, as our fathers have been laid before us, in the grave. And happy is he, who calmly and Christianly thinking of his death,—still more, he who lying on his bed, and feeling that his strength is failing him day by day or hour by hour, can take this blessed verse to his own heart, and contentedly and cheerfully and faithfully say before God,—"I will lay me down in

peace and take my rest, for it is Thou, Lord, only that makest me to dwell in safety." I am content, I will lay me down, since it is Thy will, O God; I will lay me down in peace: in peace with Thee, for Thou hast redeemed me, for Thou hast bought me with Thine own Blood, Thou hast washed me with Thy Regenerating Spirit, Thou hast considered my contrition, Thou hast accepted my tears, Thou hast pardoned my sins for Christ's sake, I feel Thy grace and blessing strengthening my soul even as my body decays. And being at peace with Thee, I am at peace with myself. I have taken leave of the anxious and carking cares which kept too tight and close a hold upon my mind when I was strong and well. But they are gone now. My heart has reached a purer atmosphere. I breathe more peacefully now that I feel nearer,—nearer far than ever before,—to Thee. And being at peace with Thee, and with myself, I am at perfect Christian peace with all my neighbours. I desire their full Christian forgiveness if I have in any way offended them, I give them my full Christian forgiveness for everything in which they have offended me. God give them grace to feel as perfect peace as I do, when the time comes for them also to lay themselves down at the calling of God, and be no more seen upon the earth. I will lay me down and take my rest. What does it matter to me, if my poor decaying

body be laid in the grave—my soul will take its rest in the paradise of God. I shall be in the unseen place, along with the saints of God who have departed hence before me, and by His great mercy in Christ I shall be reckoned among them. For it is Thou, Lord, only that hast made me dwell in safety during my life, or enabled me to feel this blessed, faithful safety in my death. Thy will, O faithful God, be done! I am Thine whether in the body or out of the body, and thanks to the unspeakable love of my Redeemer, Thou art mine!

This is, brethren, but a slight and hasty sketch of the riches of this verse; and, believe me, the Psalms will throughout reward your close study and continued devotional use with like riches of Christian meditation. They are *all but* Christian in their actual words: they are *to us* who read them by the light of the Gospel really Christian in their hidden meaning, and we make them altogether Christian when, according to the ancient usage of the Church of Christ, we finish each one of them by dedicating it to the glory of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

I will only make one more observation, brethren, on the verse of which I have been speaking.

As it applies, first, to our taking of our natural nightly rest in sleep, and secondly, to the last long sleep of death: —so every time we fall asleep at night, we do rehearse,

as it were, and go over the scene of dying. He who would die in Christian faith and cheerfulness must learn to go to sleep at night in Christian faith and cheerfulness. He who would lie down in the grave in peace, and take his rest in faith that the Lord will make him dwell in the heavenly kingdom in safety and happiness, must learn to lay himself down at night in Christian peace with God, with his neighbour, and with his own heart. Thus only will he prepare for the last great sleep,—which must come before long, which may come at any moment:—for who knows whether the very next time he lays himself down to natural sleep, he may not have his waking in the world of spirits, and his work and trial upon earth be done?

A Christian man, a Christian woman should bear this in mind, and come by God's grace to such habitual preparedness as to lie down at night, in holy Christian peace with God and Man, ready and willing to take the rest which God may give, for a few hours, or till the judgment-day,—for it is God only that maketh us dwell, or live, or die in safety.

Ye have not so learned Christ

EPHESIANS iv.

20, 21. *But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus.*

ST. PAUL in this passage, which stands in the midst of the Epistle for the day, is urging the people of Ephesus to abandon more completely than they seem hitherto to have done, all the unholy and ungodly ways of living, which, like other Gentile people, they had practised before they were baptized into the Christian Church. He presses hard, if I may so speak, upon them. This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind, that is, in the foolish, wicked, self-chosen ways that the Gentiles round you walk in,—having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts,—for they, like blind men, not having any clear rule or direction which way to

go, wander wildly about, doing all sorts of things which are vile and unholy,—for being past feeling, they have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. I beg you, he seems to say, I conjure you, I most earnestly implore you, not to go on like them.

Ye are Christians—ye have learned Christ—ye have heard Christ, ye have been taught by Christ, ye have been taught the true lesson of Christ, the lesson as it was exhibited in Christ Himself,—so that *ye*, being so taught, must put off the old behaviour, the old man which is corrupt, by following the deceitful lusts, and must be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and must put on the new man, which, after the likeness of God, is created again in righteousness and true holiness.

Now I cannot venture to say for certain that the Christians of Ephesus had really forgotten their Christian instruction, and had fallen far back into their old Gentile ways of living; but I am sure that they must have found it very difficult to keep up steadily and uniformly to the Christian rule of life. Only think how in all their former days they had been going on: how they had grown up as children, and boys, and men; surrounded by people who were living the loosest, most careless, and impure lives; bred up to think all this not wrong, but the regular and universal way of life,—seeing their parents and friends doing so, never learning, nor seeing

anything better,—never warned, never taught, never preached to publicly, nor advised privately,—accustomed all their lives long to do just what their own lusts and likings prompted them to do. You can easily conceive, brethren, what a dreadful state of things it must have been, and what a miserable, wicked, unhappy life they must have led,—for let men say or think as they will about it, a wicked life is an unhappy one, and always will be an unhappy one.

Well, in the midst of all this sad state of things, there comes to Ephesus by ship from Corinth, a man, a Jew, of no particularly striking appearance, nor power of words,—and he speaks to them. They crowd round him to listen. He tells them strange things, he tells them that in a land far away from theirs God has prepared a people, for well nigh two thousand years, for His service, whom they have never heard of,—that He has sent them prophets, one after another,—that at last He has sent them His own Son in the form of a man, to bring them to repentance; but that these rebellious people, who would not listen to the prophets, have rejected the Son of God, and actually crucified the Blessed Lord of Life. He tells them that this death of Jesus Christ was willingly and knowingly undergone; for that the Son of God did lay down His life, and suffer His precious Blood to be shed, in order to turn and save all mankind from sin and

death. He tells them that that crucified Lord, after lying in the grave for three days, rose again by the divine power of God from the dead, and after forty days of occasional companionship with His apostles, rose visibly into Heaven; there to remain till the day on which He shall return to judge all mankind in righteousness. He tells them that though he was not one of the first disciples of the Lord Himself, yet that the Lord had graciously appeared to him from Heaven when he was going to Damascus for the purpose of persecuting His disciples, and had given him a commission to preach His saving Name to all the heathen whom he could reach. He tells them that though he had received this commission, yet he did not venture to act upon it till he had gone through all the orderly course of preparation—till he had been baptized by Ananias, till he had been presented to the Church at Jerusalem by Barnabas, till he had retired for study and meditation and prayer for many months to Tarsus, and till by the express direction of the Holy Ghost he had been consecrated and ordained to the office of an Apostle by the brethren at Antioch.

Strange, wonderful, unheard of things! and how, think you, must the sound of them have fallen upon the ears of those Ephesians?

Can we not fancy how some who thought themselves wise scoffed at the speaker, and scorned with utter scorn

and contempt all that he said? Can we not fancy how some, the loose living and the loose talking loiterers about the city (we know such, brethren, even in our own Christian days), refused to listen, and turned back to their old godless ways, resolved that *they*, at least, would have nothing to say to such old-wives' tales, as they would call them? And can we not fancy how some,—many perhaps,—poor even more than rich (at least it was certainly so at Corinth, and I suppose it was probably so at Ephesus also), listened with the utmost interest, wonder, and delight. Can we not fancy them drinking in the holy, gracious words? lingering, clinging, longing,—wondering if the blessed things they heard of could possibly be meant for them,—begging the Apostle, and the two or three friends who accompanied him, to tell them more and more of the wonderful news: —the Saviour, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, the coming of His Holy Ghost, the certainty of His future return in judgment. Can we not almost hear them in the agony of their earnest hope and prayers, cry aloud "Men and brethren what shall we do?" And what, think you, did St. Paul say in answer, except that which St. Peter said on the great day of Pentecost, when the same question was asked of him, by the great multitude which witnessed the miracle of the unknown tongues? Repent,—repent of your sins,—repent and be

baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the pardon of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

And so, they came, penitent, faithful, thankful. They received baptism from the hands of the companions of the Apostle, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, the seed of eternal life, the seed of eternal strength, and purity, and holiness was sown in their hearts. It was quietly, soberly, reverently done: no violence, no excitements, no screaming, no contortions,—but the sober, thankful, penitent, faithful surrendering of their bodies and souls to the obedience of their Master, Christ. I dare say there were tears. When men and women are in such deep earnest, tears will gush out, tears of joyful gratitude, and most loving reverence; silent tears, that speak louder than distempered fears,—what is so shrill as silent tears?

Well!—the Church of Ephesus was founded so. The Apostle, like a wise master builder, had laid the foundation by preaching Christ, and he had baptized, I know not how many, men and women,—had laid, as it were, the first *course* of living stones in the wall of the Christian Temple in that great city;—and I suppose that there was a wonderful peace, and a joy never felt before

in the hearts of that small company. I have not time to tell you now, brethren, how it fared with these poor people, how the Apostle stayed with them nearly three years, and gathered a large congregation of Christians round him;—how he was attacked by Demetrius and his fellow workpeople, so violently, that he describes it as having fought with beasts at Ephesus,—how he was driven away, and apparently never visited Ephesus again, where he had set up his young friend and pupil, Timothy, as bishop. All this, and more, we read of in Holy Scripture, so that we come to know a good deal about the early Ephesian Church,—more than of most of the Churches of that ancient time.

But when the Apostle wrote this letter he had been long absent from them. He was now in Rome, probably in prison, and I suppose there can be no doubt that he was moved to write this letter by reports which had reached his ears of the state of things in his now populous and much enlarged Church of Ephesus.

He found that the old Gentile habits were creeping in again among his Christian people. He found that, surrounded as they were by people who had not joined the company of the baptized, they—at least some of them —were falling back more or less into their old ways. So he wrote to them most earnestly, pressing upon them the absolute necessity of keeping from these Gentile

ways, if they hoped still to retain the Holy Spirit in their hearts, and to continue in the love of God and the hope of heaven. Judging from the next verses, I suppose that lying, malice, dishonesty, and theft, and bad and filthy talking, were the principal evils which he desired to warn them against. And, oh, brethren, what heathenish, unchristian things these are!—Ye, he says to them, have not so learned Christ, if so be, that ye have heard him and have been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus. Observe the Apostle's language. Ye have learned Christ: observe, he does not say learned the commandments, or the laws of Christ: but *learned Christ*,—and further, *as the truth is in Jesus;* that is, *learned Christ such as He truly is;* learned Him, studied His example, striven to imitate it, learned His words, lived up towards His example, according as that example is truly and faithfully portrayed to you in His Gospel.

Pray mark this, brethren. St. Paul, feeling his people in danger of falling away into various heathenish sins, sets before them the pattern of Christ as truly exhibited in the man Jesus, and says to them, How can ye do these things, how can ye live and do such things as I hear ye do, if ye study and learn that pattern? He assumes that all Christians do study and learn that pattern: that they keep the example of the Redeemer

before their eyes, and continually study and reflect upon it: that they read His doings and His sayings till they know them so well,—so well as men say *by heart* (for their *hearts* are in the study) that they can always picture to themselves how Jesus, the man Jesus, would have acted in any case that presents itself to themselves to act in. There is a beautiful book, written in a foreign country, long before the Reformation, which has been a great treasure to pious Christians for many centuries, called *The Imitation of Christ*, which is written to enable people to study the example of Christ and to imitate it more and more completely. It is a good and holy book, and useful to those who read it. But we all have *the* book, the real book, the book of books, the Bible. And there that pattern is set forth in the fullest, truest, and most perfect light. There we may learn Christ, as the truth is in Jesus. There we may learn what, and what manner of man He was, and what manner of men it behoves us to be. You will find, if you try, that His example comes nearer to you than perhaps you think. For He mingled among men. He was a dutiful child, a good boy, an industrious and home keeping youth. He earned His bread by work of His own hands as a carpenter. He paid all due tributes and taxes. He attended the regular Temple services. He did not disdain even the cheerful, innocent, meeting

of friends, but He loved to seek rather the home of sorrow and affliction. He showed endless proofs of mercy, sweetness, and goodness. He endured all contradictions of sinners; when He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself unto Him that judgeth righteously.

Believe me, the example of the man Christ Jesus will follow you, if you will study and learn it according to its very truth and reality, into the details of your actual life. In your family, in your business, in your idle times of refreshment, in your mirth, in your sadness, in your sympathy with other people's joy and sadness, the example of Jesus Christ, if you will study it and keep it before your mind, will help you to know what to do, and how to feel and how to behave. There is no part nor corner of innocent human life to which it will not supply a model,—the very model and pattern which you need.

And believe me when I say further, that by really trying to copy it, you will actually grow more like to it. You know that this is our very Christian profession,—to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto Him. What we hope for is, that when He shall appear again, we may be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. The way, then, to grow to be like Him, is to study His true likeness now, and

endeavour with all our hearts to copy it. We know where to find His likeness. It is painted for us, if I may use such an expression, in the Bible. There we must study it, and from there we must copy it in our own lives, trying by God's grace to be so pure, so dutiful, so gentle, so obedient, so true, so kindly affectioned, so strict in keeping to God's worship and service, so brave to bear and to forbear, so simple, so earnest, so holy. The sins of the Gentiles are, alas! still round us much more than they ought to be, much more than might have been thought possible in a Christian land. But if we have learned Christ as the true likeness of Him is, and if we carefully study it by reading, and endeavour to copy it in our own way of living, praying, and behaving, we shall by God's grace be kept from these things, and be made to grow more and more like Him,—more and more fit to live as Christians, more and more fit to rise like Him, when the day comes when He shall appear again upon the earth, and we shall see Him as He is.

Trinity Sunday

GENESIS xviii.

1. *And the Lord appeared unto Abraham in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent-door in the heat of the day.*
2. *And he lift up his eyes, and looked, and lo, three men stood by him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent-door, and bowed himself toward the ground,*
3. *And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant.*

WHY is this eighteenth chapter of the Book of Genesis chosen, out of all the Old Testament, to be the first Lesson for Trinity Sunday? We read in it of the visit of the three angels to Abraham, of the promise given to Sarah of the birth of Isaac, and of the pleading of Abraham with God for Sodom, which might have been spared if there had been but ten righteous men among all its people.

Good and useful and edifying matter all this, no doubt; but what connection has it with the special subject of Trinity Sunday? What has it to do with the great Christian doctrine of God the Father, the Son,

and the Holy Ghost—God in substance One, in Person Three—the great Christian doctrine which belongs to this day?

Brethren, the answer to this question, as far as regards the eighteenth chapter, is to be found in the verses which I have read to you for the text.

It is one of those mysterious passages of the Old Testament which, in a dim and dark way, point to the Christian doctrine. It is one of those many mysterious passages which show, that though God did not think fit to reveal the doctrine of the Holy Trinity to the Jews, yet He was preparing it—saying things which meant it, though the Jews did not yet observe or understand them—saying things which, afterwards, when the doctrine was revealed to them, they would look back to and remember, and so come to perceive that, in a secret and hidden way, God had in fact been saying the same thing to them all along, though in such a way that they had not perceived it. So, in the first Lesson for this morning's service, the first chapter of Genesis, the reason why that chapter is read on Trinity Sunday is, that it contains this verse, "And God said, Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness." The Jews did not observe nor understand this, "Let *us* make man"—"*us*," "*our* image," "*our* likeness." They could not know who was meant by "we" and "us" in that verse; but

we Christians know. We know that it meant the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—the hitherto unrevealed *Trinity* in the *Unity* of God.

The same is the case with the eighteenth chapter, appointed to be read as the first Lesson for this evening's service. In the first three verses, which I have read for the text, you will see, if you examine them, another very remarkable intimation of the same doctrine. As Abraham sat in his tent-door in the heat of the day, three angels stood before him. Why did he bow himself down toward the ground, and say, "My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant?" Why, if they were three, did he address them as one? Why did he not call them "*Lords?*" Why did he not say, "If I have found favour in *your* sight?" The Jews who read the story in the Book of Genesis could not have answered this question; but we can answer it: we know that this is one of those dim and early intimations of the great Christian doctrine; we know that it was an appearance of God, and that, while he was in Person Three, he was in substance only One; we know that it was another of those mysterious things which could not be altogether understood till the revelation of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity threw light upon them, and showed that God had all along been preparing His secret witness,

which would become quite clear and certain at the last.

Now, there are a great number of passages in the Old Testament to the same purpose—passages, I mean, which, though they were not understood, and perhaps could not have been understood by the Jews, yet to us show quite plainly how, while God is always spoken of as being *One*, One in His Substance, Power, and Eternity, yet there was also in the Unity of God an Eternal Father, who should spare His Eternal Son out of the bosom of His love, to be born and live and die for the restoration of fallen man, and an Eternal Spirit who should dwell in the hearts of His people, and enable them to benefit by the redemption so purchased for them.

So it was that gradually, more and more as the ages went on, God prepared to make known His great Christian doctrine. The Jews, who had the Old Testament, did not see it, though it was there. They could not read it, though to our eyes, looking back, it seems so plainly written there.

And then, at last, when the Son of God came down to earth; still more, when the Holy Spirit visibly descended upon Him at Jordan in the form of a dove, and the Father's voice was heard from heaven, the great truth was shown, that God, who is One, and must not

be conceived as more than One, is yet in some sort Three, One Only God of heaven and earth, but still in that One God Three Persons—the creating Father, the redeeming Son, and the sanctifying Spirit.

Many words were spoken by the Lord Himself during His stay upon earth, throwing more and more light upon this great doctrine; and then, at last, when He had conquered death by rising from the grave, and all power was given unto Him both in heaven and in earth, He gave to the Church the full statement of the truth when He said, "*Go, teach all nations, and baptize them into the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.*"

Observe, brethren, this is the great commission which Christ has given to His Apostles, and in them to His Church.

Go—go forth from Jerusalem; go to the east and the west, to the north and to the south; go to the men of every climate and colour; to the white men of Europe and the black men of Africa; to the red men of America, and to the copper-coloured men of the Southern seas; go and teach them the Name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; go, teach them that there is One Only God, but that, in the Unity of God, they are to believe in the Father who hath made all the world, the Son who hath redeemed all mankind, and the Holy

Ghost who sanctifieth all the elect people of God. Teach them this, and make them disciples of that teaching; teach it in all its particulars; teach it constantly, painfully, unceasingly. All the treasures of Divine wisdom and knowledge given to man are contained in that Holy Name. Teach it to them thoroughly, earnestly, unweariedly. And when they have learned it well, and know it perfectly, and have, by God's grace, come to believe it with all their hearts and souls, then baptize them into it. Wash them with pure water, and as you wash them, call over them the sacred Name of the Three Persons in the One God. Say over each of them, as you dip them in the water, or pour the water upon them, "I baptize thee in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Observe, then, I say, brethren, how very great this doctrine is, and how extremely important it must be to us, one and all, to know it and believe it rightly. See how it was prepared all through the Old Testament; see how it was intimated more and more fully all through our Lord's own life and discourses; and see how at last, in the very last words which He spake before He left the earth in the flesh, it was made to be the very substance of all Christian teaching, the great truth into which men were to be baptized when taught, and by which men so taught and baptized, and obeying,

were to find that Christ was surely with them, even unto the end of the world.

And we go on teaching it. We teach it in the Belief; for what do we chiefly learn in the articles of our Belief but this? First, I learn to believe in God the Father, who hath made me and all the world; secondly, in God the Son, who hath redeemed me and all mankind; thirdly, in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me and all the elect people of God. We teach it in the Catechism; we teach it in our Prayers, in our Litany, in our Hymns; we teach it to our children in school, to our people in church; we send missionaries abroad to heathen nations to teach it to them; we do our best to keep up the knowledge of it among the crowded populations and the scattered populations of our cities and villages at home. For we know that in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, all Christian truth is contained; that in the body of those who believe in that Name dwells the Holy Spirit, who alone can sanctify us, or enable us to please God. We know that that Name is like a tower of strength, and that, as long as we hold fast by it, believing with all our hearts the doctrine which it contains, and obeying with all our might the things which it commands, so long none can hurt us, or take us out of the favour and love of God, who has put us into it, or deprive us of

the faithful and happy hope of heaven which it gives us.

It is possible, brethren, that I may have seemed in what I have said, to be speaking in an unusual way—not such as you are most accustomed to hear in sermons. But to-day is Trinity Sunday, and the object of appointing Trinity Sunday is that we may dwell to-day, not so much on any particular details of Christian doctrine or practice, as upon the one great Christian doctrine itself, the great doctrine of One God in Three Persons. On other Sundays we speak of all the separate sayings of the Lord and His apostles, the various acts of His Life and holy Death, the Sacraments He has ordained, and the duties which He has enjoined upon us. Not so to-day. To-day we stand, as it were, upon the top of a high hill, and see the whole map of Christian doctrine laid out before us. All the many separate things which at other times we speak of one by one, as various occasions suggest them, are contained in the one great doctrine of to-day, the doctrine of One God in Three Persons; one God, who is the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

And remember, brethren, that this great Name of God has been taught to us all; that it was called over us when we were baptized; and we have to hold it very fast all our lives; believing it, obeying it, teaching

it to our children, believing it with our hearts and confessing it with our lips, living upon it as long as we live, and intending by God's grace to die with it upon our lips and in our hearts when we die.

When we die! Would we not, brethren, fain be of Christ's company then? Is it not our true heart's desire that we should be acknowledged as belonging to the flock of God then, when He separates the sheep from the goats, and sets the sheep on His right hand to enter into the everlasting joy of the Lord?

I know—all know who know their Bibles, and the sacred doctrine which has been taught in all the Church from the beginning—we all know who those are who shall be acknowledged then to be the true sheep of the flock.

Those who having been duly brought into the saving Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, have held fast by that Name, and have lived and died in it: who in their hearts have believed it, who with their lips have confessed it, and in their conduct and living constantly acted upon it.

Here, while we are alive on the earth, the Name of God is named upon us all, all who are christened. It is a vast flock, and there are it is to be feared sheep and goats in it. A vast net, full of fish, and no doubt there are many good and many bad among them.

Here, I say, the Name of God extends over a vast multitude, and no person may take upon himself to refuse a share in it to any over whom it has once been named when he was christened.

But there will be a great searching *then!* It will not then be enough to have been once brought into the sacred Name. It will then be a question of the true and humble faith which has believed it to the end; of the brave and steady confession which has, in spite of opposition or (if it should so be) persecution, confessed it to the end; of the efforts of holy living, the constant, earnest, real efforts of holy living in prayer, in Communions, in the strength of the Holy Spirit, unto the end.

And the end is not come yet—at least, to us; to us who are still left here, to serve God in our stations, to receive His warnings, and to repent, and turn to Him before we die.

We have some time still. God knows how long. Some time for watching, some time for turning, some time for praying, some time for repenting. God give us grace to use it! that we may be found at last safe in the shadow of that Blessed Name, which has been our defence, our tower of strength, our relief, our hope on earth, and shall be, if we be faithful to the end, our glory and our glorious exaltation in heaven.

My Flesh is Meat indeed

ST. JOHN vi.

54. *Whoso eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*
55. *For My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed.*

IF a Christian man of the early days of the Church—say one of St. Paul's churchmen of Corinth, or Philippi—could come back among us, the church-people of this time and country, and see the way in which we go on in respect of our religion, he would, I think, among many things that would astonish and shock him, be most astonished and shocked at the way in which our people neglect the sacrament of the Holy Communion, and feel easy and self-satisfied in neglecting it.

He would remember that, in his own days, they all continued steadfast and regular in the sacramental breaking of bread and prayers,—that they communicated at least every week on Sunday, and often besides. He would remember that the Apostle had taught him that every time he ate this bread and drank this cup, he published

to men and angels the death of the Lord, in which all his hopes rested,—that the cup was the Communion of the blood of Christ, and the bread the Communion of His body. He would remember that the Lord Himself had solemnly said that, Except we eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, we have no life in us, that whoso eateth His flesh and drinketh His blood hath eternal life, and He will raise him up at the last day; for that His flesh is meat indeed and His blood is drink indeed,—that he that eateth His flesh and drinketh His blood dwelleth in Him and He in him,—that as He liveth by the Father, so he that eateth Him shall live by Him. Then he would remember how deeply he and all his Christian friends and neighbours were moved by all this solemn teaching,—how eager they were to partake in this sacred food as often as they could,—how they blessed God for bringing their Saviour, His Sacred Body and Blood, so near to them,—how they felt happy and safe in being so close to Him,—how happy and thankful they were to know that, when they confessed their sins and repented, and came to Communion in faith and charity, they were certainly assured of God's pardon and love.

And he would remember how all this used to make him cheerful, and brave, and faithful more than anything else could,—how cheerily he went to his common work,

how bravely he met the troubles and persecutions that he was often exposed to,—feeling the presence of His Crucified and Almighty Lord ever with him, and in the consciousness of that presence ready to live or die, to be cheerful or sorrowful, as the Lord might appoint for him.

Well, I say, if a Christian of this sort, and I suppose that all the Christians of that time were of this sort, were to come among us now, would he not be astonished and shocked at the way in which he would find us disregarding and neglecting what he had been taught to prize so highly, and had found so very precious to his own soul?

He would come, suppose, to a quiet country parish,—which had been, I will suppose, a Christian parish for at least a thousand years,—which had a church which had been standing in the midst of it at least six hundred of these thousand years,—which had a population, say of six hundred men and women, baptized and Christian,—and what would he see?

I do not now speak of the schism and division which he would see, and which would surely distress him grievously,—nor of the immorality, common and not thought much of, which he would see, which would surely go near to break his heart,—but I speak only of the Holy Communion, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and the way in which it is regarded and received.

Six hundred Christian people! Surely, he would think, they flock to Communion as we used to do in the old times. Alas! he must be answered it is celebrated only once in a month, and then it is thought a great thing if fifty people, one twelfth part of the population of the parish, meet to partake of it.

What! he would exclaim,—Is it possible? What can they mean, what can they be thinking about? Have they never been taught? Have they never read their Bibles?

Oh yes, we must answer, they have a great many Bibles among them, and they think themselves very wise, and set themselves up, many of them, for teachers of their brethren, and are quite content with themselves and the way they go on.

But do they not know what St. Paul says, over and over again? Have they forgotten what our Blessed Lord says? Do they not know that unless they eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, they have no life in them? If, he would say, what you tell me is true, there must be many Christian men and women among you who never come to Communion at all, no, not in all their lives,—who grow up, and grow old, and do not know and have never tasted the blessedness of feeling themselves in that wonderful communion and nearness to their Lord which He has provided for them,

if they would but avail themselves of it. Poor, poor people! Now—he would say—I see in some degree the cause of all the other sad things I have witnessed among you. If ye remembered that all we Christians, being many, are one bread and one body, being all partakers of that one bread, ye could not break and divide from one another, instead of meeting at the same altar, shewing, by partaking of the one bread, that ye are one body, —and if ye all remembered, as ye partake of the Body of Christ, that your bodies are the members of Christ, ye could not do the things which, alas! I hear to have been too common among you.

And then such a man would surely go on to ask,— Why then do they not come? What keeps them away? What do they say about it themselves? How do they comfort themselves in their neglect?

What should I say, brethren, in answer to a man who should ask me such questions as these? How should I plead for you?

Must I not say,—Some, I fear, never think about it at all. They seldom or never come to church at all, or if they do come to church sometimes, they never let the idea of staying to Holy Communion come into their heads.

Some have a sort of intention, they say, of coming some day; but the day never comes. They are too busy, too much occupied with other things, and have not

time, they say, to think about it, and prepare themselves. Some take to finding fault with their neighbours, and say, I think I am quite as good as *so and so* who goes to the Communion; or, I don't see how such and such a person who goes to the Communion is any better for it, or any better than I am, and I don't wish to set myself up, as they do, for being better than my neighbours.

Some say, I am not good enough. I ought to be much better and holier than I am, before I can venture to go there;—forgetting that the Holy Communion is the best of all ways to become holier and better.

Some think, I am afraid of receiving unworthily, for I remember what terrible things St. Paul says about the danger of those who receive unworthily: not remembering that unworthily means carelessly and irreverently, and that no one is an unworthy receiver who comes in earnest, confessing his sins, and praying God to give him pardon and grace, and bring him nearer and nearer to Christ in this holy sacrament.

And so, for one cause or another,—all bad and groundless ones, not one of them having a shadow of reason or weight in it,—the great majority of our people stay away, and, breaking the last loving commandment of the Lord, lack the heavenly comfort, the precious spiritual strength which comes of faithful partaking in the spiritual food of the Body and Blood of their dear Lord.

Oh, my brethren, I wish I could impress, by the grace of God, upon your minds, as deeply as I feel it myself, the sense of the precious value of this Holy Communion feast.

Look at it as you will, and every way you will see that it is impossible to speak of it too strongly, or to prize it too highly.

It is the *Centre of Unity* among us. Are we not, according to St. Paul, many as we are, yet but one Bread and one Body? What does that mean? It means that if we hope we are all members of the one Body of Christ, we must all feed upon that one Bread which is given to feed that one Body. When you eat common bread, your whole body is strengthened. The nourishment extends to every limb and member of your body. What would become of this or that member if it could wilfully cut itself off from the nourishment of that common bread? Even so, the communion of this sacred Bread and Wine is to us the spring of the unity of the whole Body. One Bread, one Body,—one Body, one Bread. How can a Christian man or woman be content to go on growing older and older, and nearer and nearer to the grave, and never taste that one Bread which is the food of the one Body? No wonder we split and divide, if we have accustomed ourselves to think little of the Holy Communion, which is the very Centre of Unity, the one Bread of the one Body of the members of Christ.

Look at it again in the light of those words of Christ which I read to you for the text. It is the very source and support of spiritual strength and life in our own separate souls. The Flesh of Christ here spiritually eaten is meat indeed, and His Blood here spiritually drunk is drink indeed: real meat, real drink, meat and drink to our souls—meat and drink that will feed our souls with Divine life and strength.

Can you do without it? Can you hope to be good, can you hope to please God without it? Would not your bodies die without their proper food? Do you think your souls can live without their proper food? Are you then satisfied with yourselves? Can you be?

Look at it again thus:—"Whoso eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Do you think of this? Do you really know and consider it?

We shall die before long, and our bodies be laid, it is probable, in their quiet grave, perhaps here in this churchyard, and words of faith and hope will be spoken over us, and our place will be filled up by those who come after us.

Well: if we have the spiritual communion of the Flesh and Blood of Christ in our souls and bodies, and are resting on the promise which He has given us that He will raise us up at the last day, raise us from the

dust of the earth, to glory, happiness and immortality with Himself in the heavenly kingdom.

But what if we have gone on refusing this spiritual food during our lives, and have taken no account of this promise? What if we have gone on all our lives turning a deaf ear to the invitation, and have never tasted how gracious the Lord is in this His holy feast.

Can you bear to think of it? Will you go on without thinking of it? Is it to be so always? Will no sacred words, neither of the Lord nor of His Apostle, ever have power to waken us up to these great realities, these mighty dangers, these precious, precious promises?

Brethren, I know not which of us may be intending to draw near this morning in faith to the Holy Table, and take this Blessed Sacrament to their comfort, and which may be intending to leave the Church, and turn their backs upon it, as perhaps they may have done often before. Nor would I urge any one to come suddenly and without preparation to so solemn a thing. But I beg you all to think very seriously of what I have said. I beg you to consider how deeply it concerns your soul's health not to neglect or deprive yourselves of this precious help, nor refuse the dying command of your Saviour's infinite love.

It is true that, by the usage of the parish, we only meet for Communion once in the month,—most thank-

ful shall I be when a more widely awakened sense of its precious importance among my people shall call upon me to double the number of the celebrations.

And so, brethren, I will commend the subject to your serious thought; begging you to remember that if any person whatever, going in faith, repentance, and charity to the Holy Table, spiritually eateth the flesh of Christ, and drinketh His blood, Christ has pledged His eternal word that He will raise him or her to everlasting life: for that flesh and that blood so spiritually taken are meat indeed and drink indeed—meat and drink of the soul—meat and drink of immortality and unending happiness in Heaven.

The Corn of Wheat Dying and Multiplied

St. John xii.

24. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*

NO person, I imagine, can have failed to observe in reading the Gospels how continually our Lord takes advantage of all sorts of natural objects to illustrate and enforce His teaching. It was, it may be said, an Eastern manner. No doubt it was so; but to us it comes as a very characteristic part of our Lord's own teaching. It would seem as if He never let any real natural object pass without drawing from it some religious lesson: and so He has impressed, if I may so express myself, all sorts of religious lessons upon the things by which we are surrounded. Does the wind blow where it listeth? to-day from the east, to-morrow from the west? Do we hear the sound thereof as we lie on our beds, and with all our boasted science, yet

know neither whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth? The Lord has bidden that wind remind us of the viewless operations of the Holy Spirit, and of the naturally undiscoverable movements of mind of those who are born of the Spirit.

The vine, and the vine-dresser: common sights in these countries, they speak of the Church of Christ, and the separate branches of the vine, the members of the Church: and of the way in which the Father uses, in apparent harshness, but real mercy, the knife of suffering that they may bring forth more fruit.

The sheep, the sheepfold, the shepherd: again they are full of Christ's teachings. He is the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. He has one fold. False teachers do not come in by the door, but climb up some other way. The sheep know His voice. The whole life of shepherds is full of Christian lessons.

The flowers of the field, the pretty flowers that bloom along our hedges, which are to-day and to-morrow are cut down—the lilies in their beauty more gorgeous than Solomon in all his glory; the familiar sight of the hen gathering her chickens under her wings; the light of the sun rising in the morning; the lamp set upon the lamp-stand to give light to all that are in the house; the bread that came down from Heaven; the grain sown in the earth, the harvest, the reapers, the separation of the

good grain from the weeds, the burning of the weeds, the gathering the wheat into the garner; all these and a multitude of other instances might be quoted, in which the Lord, drawing His lessons out of natural objects, may well be said to have impressed these lessons upon those natural and familiar objects, so that to a Christian well read in Holy Scripture, and bent on remembering his Lord's words, these objects may never fail of suggesting the lessons with which He has charged them. And happy, I think, are they who, living in the country, and having all these sights continually before their eyes, can avail themselves thereby of the silent lessons which by His precious bidding they are all made to teach: who hear in the wind the noiseless power; who see in the gentle rain and dew the sweet and kindly influence of the Holy Spirit; who never see the pruning of a tree, nor the sheep wandering on the down, or folded in the night, or a stray sheep away from the flock; or the flowers of the field and their beauty; or the hen gathering her chickens under her wings, or any of these usual country sights, without calling to mind what the Lord of Heaven and earth has said of each of them, and how they all and each tell of His will, and of His power, and of His infinite goodness and love.

It is to one of these particularly that I wish to call your attention to-day; and to the grain of wheat, and

the scriptural use to which it is turned. This morning, by the grace of God, we will speak of the grain of wheat in its likeness to the Lord Himself: it will supply us with a still further and not less interesting topic if we be allowed to meet here again this evening.

A grain of wheat—a single corn—which of us does not know it quite well? a little solitary thing. If that little grain remains unsown, what is so small? what so insignificant? You drop it, and do not miss it; you eat it, and do not feel that you have eaten anything. In itself, and abiding alone, it is hardly of importance enough to be remarked or observed upon.

But that grain has naturally a wonderful capacity of increase. Sow it, put it under the ground in a good soil. Let it *die*,—die, I mean, not in the sense of being reduced to nothing and being no more,—nothing can die in that sense,—but let it die, or decay according to its own nature and in the process of growth, and to what an enormous increase it will multiply. Say that from that grain spring four ears; say that each of these ears produces forty grains,—in the fourth generation of that single grain you will count above 4,000,000,000 grains which have sprung from the decay, from the death of one corn. Another generation, and the produce (I still speak not of course of the average or real produce, but of the capacity of produce) passes all ordinary count-

ing, perhaps passes all the numbers of the human race who have ever lived,—perhaps who will ever live upon the earth.

The Lord is that grain.

Had He not died for us upon the Cross and been buried, He had abode alone.

Even then, and so, He had been the most perfect of the Sons of men, the good Prophet, the wise Teacher, the purest, the meekest, the most long-suffering of mankind. But still we should have known Him only as one of others. We should not have known of His real greatness, He would not have been declared to be the Son of God by the Resurrection from the dead. He would, no doubt, have been the greatest prophet—but there were other prophets too—the wisest, holiest, purest, meekest of teachers; but others too had been these things in some degree, though not to be compared to Him.

He had abode alone: and we should have learned to admire His goodness, perhaps have tried to imitate His meekness,—have regarded Him as the greatest of the sons of men, perhaps, but still only as one of them.

He would have abode alone.

But it was His will to die: to surrender Himself into the hands of wicked men, and by them to be crucified and slain: to die upon the Cross; to be buried in the

rich man's grave; to go through the dreadful pains of penal death; to know the separation of body and soul; to go in the Spirit to the Hades, the place of the departed souls.

He died and was buried, and behold, He rose from the dead,—no longer alone, but an enormous multitude! The generations of His offspring mount up with a rapidity not less astonishing than the produce of the corn of wheat. 120 names at the first—3000 more on the first falling of the rain of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, multitudes both of men and women, a great company of the priests, mightily grew the Word of God and increased—Samaria received the Word of God—by degrees the divine seed is propagated from the fields where it first grew to distant lands. Christ the sower sends out His apostles to sow far and wide, and north and south and east and west, Asia and Europe, Greece and Rome,—their sound goes out into all lands and their words unto the ends of the world.

His is the glory of the grain: the glory of the incalculable progeny of the fruitful corn, made fruitful by dying. It would not have been so if He had not died.

We, brethren, form part of that countless multitude who have sprung from that prolific grain. We even in this distant generation owe our Christian being, our helps of goodness and grace, our hopes of Heaven, our

estate of acceptableness in the sight of God, wholly and altogether to the death and burial, to the sowing of that Divine Seed which has multiplied into so many millions. Whether the produce has in any sort degenerated, I cannot say. Whether the grain is as good and true as in the earlier generations we cannot judge: but assuredly as God still gives the natural seasons, the former and the latter rain, the genial sun, the strengthening breezes, the fertility of the soil for the growth and ripening of the vegetable grain, so He continues to give His means of blessed grace, His Holy Spirit, His Church, His Sacraments,—all the methods of growing and ripening His spiritual corn, to man still: and if it be that the grain is in any sort less good or true or sound than it was in the early days, the deficiency is not in the original richness of the seed, nor in the withdrawing of any of the divine means of its growth, but in the wilfulness and want of faith,—in the miserable worldliness and lack of care of spiritual increase and improvement in ourselves.

I say that we all, brethren, form part of the wonderful produce of that Divine Seed, that Sacred Corn, which as on Good Friday died and was buried in the earth, and as on Easter Morning sprang up to new and multiplied life,—we, and all the many millions,—the glorious throng of sainted spirits in Paradise who have

lived and died upon the earth in His faith,—and all those yet to be born, and brought into Him, and in like manner to die in Him before this world comes to its end.

But *how* is it that we belong to Him? What is it that makes us to be His children? What is it that warrants us in saying that we are so joined to Him as the grain that year by year ripens in our fields is related to the seed which was sown last autumn in the furrow? What right have we to claim this close and intimate relation to Him?

I answer, brethren, by referring you to what St. Paul says to the Romans in the opening of the sixth chapter of his epistle to that church. "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this that our old man is crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. Likewise reckon ye yourselves also to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Now in these great verses, brethren, we have the real *Bible answer* to the question I just now asked,—namely, how it is that we are warranted in saying that we are so joined with Christ as the ripening grain is joined and related to the autumn seed. It is that we have been by baptism buried along with Him. It is that in the sacred font of baptism we have, as the apostle says, been planted together with Him, and shared His death. It was our baptism that gave us a right to hold ourselves to be His, to be, in Him, dead unto sin, and to have the beginnings of that life which is alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The beginning, brethren, but not the end. The blessed beginning, but only the beginning. We are no doubt buried with Him by baptism into death, but the object of that burying is, that, as He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

And herein is the question, the real and vital question, for every one of us,—how far we are walking in newness of life; really, and as God sees us, striving with all our might to repent of our sins, and rise continually, and every day to greater and more real holiness; how far we are really living in faith, living in prayer, endeavouring, by the grace of God, to square ourselves, our outward and our inward living, with His holy law, and

make our wills altogether true to His will. This is the real question,—the question for every one; for old people and young people; for rich people and for poor people; for those who know enough to be able to teach others, and those whose place it rather is to be taught. And it is a question which each must, after all, answer for himself. For no other person whatever can penetrate deep enough, or be admitted any way, to see and judge of the secrets of another man's conscience sufficiently to answer it for him. Each must answer it for himself now, as each must answer *for it* for himself when the day of judgment comes.

It would be, I think, well and not unprofitable, if we who live in the country, and see all these country sights which our Lord made such use of, were to be in the habit of remembering the lessons which He put upon them whenever we see them: that when, for example, we see the labourer throwing his seed broadcast on the field, or, it may be, with more skilful and careful husbandry drilling it along the rows, we took pains to remember Him who did not abide alone, but died and was buried in order that He might spring up at Easter with that wonderful produce of which I have been speaking, —that when we see the blade springing gaily under the early warmth of the sun, we should recall the thought that it is not always the deepest and richest soils that

spring the quickest, nor are the cleanest from various kinds of mischievous and choking weeds,—that as we see the crops waving in the summer breeze we should remember that under fair appearance there may often be secret blight, and rust, that does not meet the eye, but wofully injures the grain; and that parishes and people may bear an outwardly Christian seeming and yet may have secret blights of sin, and uncleanness, and unfaithfulness among them that are not outwardly visible,—that when we see the sickle put to the corn, and the sheaves, and the harvesting, we should remember the last harvest of the spiritual corn of God, in which we shall all be gathered,—either as good grain into the garner of Heaven, or as empty ears, and useless chaff for the burning.

These things are a help, if we will use them; and we cannot spare such helps. For indeed we have, each one of us, a great work to do,—to make, by the help of the grace of God, our heavenly calling and election sure! A great work indeed! the greatest that can be! A work great in itself, great to our friends, inexpressibly great to ourselves. And little time to do it in—none to waste.

We of this distant generation are late grains of this mighty crop; conscious of much blight of sin, conscious of much imperfect obedience of growth:—but the Sun of

Grace still shines upon us, the blessed rains of the Holy Spirit are still with us in the opportunities of prayer, and self-control, and holy exercises,—He is not actually laying at this moment the sickle to the stalk. Shall He find us such as He would have us,—faithful, true, penitent, holy?

Thank God, brethren, the question is still by His mercy open to each one among us.

The Seed Corn springing to New Life

1 CORINTHIANS XV.

36. *That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die.*

I SPOKE to you this morning, brethren, about the corn of wheat, and how, unsown, it abode alone, a little, trifling, solitary, insignificant thing, but how when going through its own natural process of death and decay, it was endued with a wonderful capacity of increase, so that in four sowings the produce might very much more than equal the whole sum of the human race: and following the teaching of our Lord and St. Paul we were bidden to see in this little corn the likeness of our Lord dead, buried, and risen; and to regard ourselves as being in baptism dead and buried with Him, so as to rise, if by His grace we will rise, to newness of life, and more perfect penitence and devotion.

It is a very true, and a very cheering thought, and

one which may well occur, over and over again, to Christian people when, living in the country, they see the process going on around them of the autumn or the spring sowing of the corn of the year.

But in the richness of Bible imagery this is not the only application made of the homely sight of the death and rising again of the corn of wheat, and the verse, of which I have read a part for the text, will remind you to what purpose it is applied by St. Paul in the great chapter which we read in the burial service, the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

We pass now from the subject of the buried Christ, springing up into an enormous multitude of spiritual sons: and we have to speak of each one of these spiritual sons, and what will befall us—you and me, brethren, when the day comes when we, like corns of wheat, shall die and decay in the ground, our bodies solemnly laid, it may be, in the church-yard that is so near us, and where we have laid so many that we have known and loved. For here again the image of the grain of wheat meets us in Holy Scripture, and is charged with a very sacred and a very comforting lesson.

We sow the seed: ripe, dry, hard. We do our little part: a very little part indeed of the whole work, but still a necessary part. For if we did not do that little

part, the rest could not be done. If we did not sow in well ploughed and prepared soil, all that wonderful inward capacity of growth in the seed would not develop itself, nor would the sun, and the rain, and the sweet air bring forth the grain and ripen it. We do, I say, our little, yet necessary part, and then we leave the seed to God. By His mighty power the work soon begins. The seed begins to soften, to decay, to break. From its own inward power, stimulated by the protecting and stirring effects of the good soil, the decaying grain throws up a fibrous root, puts out the beginning of a blade. The process goes on deep in the earth: we cannot help or quicken it, it is none of our doing. We *can* hurt or spoil it, but we cannot assist or hasten it. After a time, the secret work begins to shew. The bright tender blade, the gradually growing stalk, the broad flag—by degrees the developed ear, until, the due season having arrived, and the various influences of sun, air, and rain having done their work, the full ripe corn in the ear. What was sown was the single grain, what has grown has been the same and yet different—the bright green bud, the milky stem, the blossoming, and by degrees the ripening plant.

Now it is in this sameness, united to this difference which there is between the seed-corn and the growing plant that St. Paul bids us see the likeness which they

bear to our own bodies, when after the soul has been by God's good will parted from them, they die, and are turned again to their earth.

In the case of the seed-corn, the change begins to take place at once. Hardly is the grain deposited in the prepared soil before the first indications of the change begins. The seed moistens, swells, bursts, puts out its thread of root, and its tender shoot. For the process is one to be repeated every year; and there is no stay in the loving work which thus furnishes bread to the eater as long as the world lasts.

To all this continual work, and yearly succession of seed-time and ripening, the case of our own bodies furnishes no parallel. To our sight no process of restoration begins in the grave. We lay the bodies of our dear friends, as we look forward that our own will be laid in the earth; and we know that for the present no change, except that of further and further decay awaits them. They moulder away to the dust from which they were first taken, and to which they must return again. No *science* knows—I mean no earthly, human science knows—of any resurrection for them. They seem to perish; to mix with the soil. Their day seems to be over. They seem to be irrecoverable, undistinguishable, at an end. But what human science is entirely blind to see, and incapable of knowing, Divine science, the

revelation of God in Holy Scripture teaches us plainly; and faith knows well and certainly, what human knowledge cannot discover or surmise. We know that it will go on awhile *so* as it goes on now. We know that so long as the present world continues there will be no change.

But a day will come—when, how far off we know not—suddenly, without warning, except to such as are faithfully watching—when things will be changed.

There will be men and women still alive, and going on in their ways, and about their usual occupations on the earth.

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last Trumpet—for the Trumpet shall sound and the blast shall be heard over all the world, and shall penetrate even the grave—the dead shall be raised.

All—all who have ever lived, bone coming again to bone, the sinews and the flesh coming upon them, and skin covering them—the breath of God breathing once more into their nostrils—all shall start up from the dust in that moment.

Shall they be the same as they were before? Yes; in a certain way the same, for we know well that they will be able to recognise one another; we know that they will carry with them either the glorious marks of their sufferings for Christ's sake, or the wretched tokens

of their shame and everlasting contempt. Shall they be different from what they were before? Yes; surely, in a certain way they shall be different; even as the green blade and milky stalk and the full blossoming ear are different from the bare grain, the dry, little, unsightly corn which last autumn rotted in the ground. Shall they be more different than they were before, or more like? Shall the difference or the likeness be the stronger? I venture to say that the difference shall be the stronger. For while it is plain, as I have said, that they will be so much alike as to be known and recognised, what a mighty difference will it be that corruption should have put on incorruption, that dishonour should have been changed to glory, that weakness should have become power, that mortality should have become immortality! What a mighty difference will it be that pain shall be no more, that all doubt should be over, that the favour of God should be eternally assured, that everlasting happiness and glory should be begun!

No doubt they will be in some sort the same: and it is a matter of thankfulness, deep thankfulness, to believe so: that we shall see and know, and not doubt, but recognise the very truth of those whose looks we have known and loved so long and so well upon the earth. And yet, comforting as this reflection is, I seem to find still more comfort in the thought of the differ-

ence, the difference in sameness, which there will then be. For we might have distressed ourselves in speculating whether they should bear the likeness of their youth, or their old age; whether they would rise as those knew them who were taken away in the days of their strength and beauty, or as those knew them who remember only the days of their feebleness and grey hairs. Now, we have no need of any such speculation. They will rise in the beauty of a glorified life: themselves, known and knowing; bright, glorious, immortal. I love to dwell on this thought. The last recollections of those from whom we have been called upon to part, are, for the most part, greatly saddened by the altered looks, the strangly painful effects of mortal sickness: and some part of the sad sorrow of such losses lies in the distressing memory of these changes. But all this is of the earth, earthy. It has no place in the Resurrection. The waste of the last illness will disappear, like the decay of old age, and all the other imperfections and distresses of the mortal state; and the faithful, those who die in Christ, shall rise in Christ, wakening up after His glorious likeness, and satisfied with it. Satisfied! yes, indeed. Happy, indescribably happy; all tears wiped away for ever from their eyes; children of God, being children of the Resurrection. Now, this is the use which, according to the teaching of St. Paul, we

may make of the ordinary sight of sowing the seed-corn. Even so shall our bodies be committed to the earth, and decay unto dust: even so,—not naturally, but divinely, not gradually but in a moment, not next spring, and each succeeding spring, but at the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to judge the world,—shall they spring up at the trumpet blast, perfect in that moment, glorious, and immortal.

Brethren, these are very comforting thoughts. And we need them. In the midst of the sorrows of this earth;—those that we feel in regard to our own dear friends, and those which we witness in others, we greatly need the Divine comfort which comes from them. And not less, as regards ourselves: for we well know that our day is but put off a while, and that we must be laid in the grave too like those who have been called away before us and from our side.

Very comforting thoughts: as are all the thoughts that belong to the Redemption which Christ has wrought for us, and to the next world which, by His precious Sacrifice, He has offered to us. But then come the great practical questions: Have we a right to them? Have we grounds for taking that comfort to ourselves? Are we such,—are we living so,—are we so faithful, so penitent, so full of true prayers and effects of real holiness, as to have any title to lay that comfort to

our own hearts? or are we deceiving ourselves all the time?

I do not speak about our friends who are gone. If they were faithful, and true, and if they died in Christ, there is no doubt about them. They are with Him Whom they have believed, and their resurrection to happiness and glory is assured. No doubt about them, if they were really penitent and faithful.

But what of ourselves? Living on,—adding day to day,—in the midst of temptation,—weak in ourselves, and, except by the grace of God, unable to stand firm in faith and obedience,—what of ourselves? Have we a right to comfort ourselves with the strong assurance that we too shall be with them when that great day comes, and like them rise in Christ to glory and immortality?

This is the *home question;* it is the real question. Unless we can answer it with some real and well-grounded answer, all the comfort which I have been speaking of—precious as it may be and is to others—is nothing to us: worse than nothing; for by the contrast it makes our own case only so much the more unhappy.

O brethren! it is heart-breaking to think,—and must we not think?—that there may probably be unspeakable unhappiness in reserve for many who will go on now living ill, and hoping well, living as though God had

given them no law, and appointed them no judgment, and yet taking it for granted that all is going to be quite well with them at the last!

Will you not think of it? As I said this morning, so I repeat now. It is a question which each one must answer for himself now, as he must certainly answer *for it* for himself when the Day of Judgment comes.

This, then, is another of those precious lessons which Holy Scripture attaches to the grain of corn: and I might go on to speak of others besides. I said this morning that it seemed to me a very happy thing that, living in the country, we are surrounded by all these various sights and scenes on which the Lord has impressed these various lessons. May I not add to this observation a further one? There are many of you who are present here, whose daily labour is with the fields. Do you not think that you might think of the Lord's lessons, as you are actually doing with your own hands the very things which He spake of. You sow the seed in the field: what are you doing, but acting a likeness, as it were, of the Lord dead and buried in the earth, to spring up a million-fold in Christian souls, His members? You sow the seed in the field: what are you doing, but acting a likeness, as it were, of Christian burial, leading to a glorious Christian resurrection? You reap the crop when it is ripe: what are you doing but acting, as in a

play, the angels' work when the world shall be done? You bind the sheaves, and drive them off to the barn or the rick: what are you doing but, as in a play, what the angels will do, when you will be the sheaves, when God will thoroughly sift His threshing-floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire?

Might not those who work in the fields,—would it not be well that the farmer, and the farm-labourer, those whose occupation and whose living comes of these things, should call to mind the lessons which the Lord has laid upon them? should think of all the great things He has said about the seed-corn, and its secret growing, of the stony ground, and the weedy ground, and the good ground,—of the poisonous weeds mixed with the good corn,—of the reapers and the harvest,—all the very things in the midst of which your life is spent?

But not to agricultural labourers only, but to us all, these dear and sweet lessons are addressed: and the particular one of which I have been speaking this evening bears upon us all: all who have lost friends,—all who have friends whom they may lose,—all who look forward to the day when they themselves shall be called away, and be laid in the grave.

The subject is a sad one: but it has a cheerfulness and a brightness which is deeper than its sadness.

And to those who will be in real and serious earnest, who will turn to God in faithful repentance and true prayers, who will put themselves, in body, soul, and spirit, under the holy discipline of the blessed Spirit of God, the lesson of the seed-corn springing up to a new life,—the same and yet different,—the same and yet gloriously blessed and different,—will be a deep and divine comfort which will never disappoint them.

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

ST. JOHN xiv.

6. *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.*

THESE sacred words, brethren, are, I may safely say some of the most precious words among the many precious words of Holy Scripture. I feel particularly called upon to dwell upon them to-day,* and to endeavour, with God's assistance, to impress them in their true meaning and force upon your conscience and memory. The Lord had said to the apostles,—it was the solemn evening before the Crucifixion, and they had just partaken of His spiritual Body and Blood in the first communion of the Lord's Supper,—the Lord, I say, had just said to the apostles, Whither I go ye know,

* This Sermon was preached in consequence of the spreading, by some unknown person, of a tract through the greater part of the parish, in which this text was interpreted so as to undervalue the Sacraments, and to urge people to leave the Church and attend the Dissenting Chapel.

and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto Him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.

Thomas, speaking for himself and the other apostles, declared that he knew neither the place to which the Lord was going, nor the way to reach it.

The Lord answers both questions, and His words of answer are full of the most precious value to every son of man who will hear and embrace them.

He was going to His Father in heaven, where were the many mansions which He promised to prepare for them, that where He was, there they might be also.

No further doubt as to *whither* He was going.

And what about the *way* to get there? I, He says, am the way. But how, we may reverently ask, are we to understand this? How can any one, how can Christ be a *way?* We know that a way means in general a road, a path, a track, along which a person travels to reach the place to which he is bound. How, then, are we to understand that Christ is the *way* to the Father?

It means, that we must be *in Christ*, united to Christ, made members of Christ's body, made living branches of Christ, who is the true Vine,—and if we are thus united to Christ, and abide in Christ, we have already reached

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the Father, for the Father and Christ are one, and he who has seen Christ has seen the Father.

Instead, therefore, of pointing out any long and weary road to heaven, Christ says, Be ye joined to Me; I am the way. I do not *shew* you the way, or guide you to the way. I *am*, Myself, the way. Be grafted into Me, abide in Me, and the journey is done. As I go to the Father, so ye, joined to Me, and abiding in Me, go to the Father also. There is no other way. No man can come to the Father by any other road. *In Christ*, we are on the way to the Father,—*out of Christ*, we are all astray, lost sheep, wandering in a wilderness, hungry and thirsty, fainting, helpless, and without hope.

Now, so much might have sufficed to answer the Apostle's question: for these words by themselves told him whether the Lord was going, and what was the way by which men were to reach the place. But the Lord always gives very full measure, full and running over; and He does not stop with the words that merely answer the Apostle's question. He says, not only I am the way,—but He adds, *the Truth, and the Life:* and we must consider what these great words mean also.

How is Christ the Truth? He does not say that He is the teacher of the truth, but that He is the very truth itself. In Him, as we read in the Epistle to the Colossians, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

So that we understand our Lord to mean that they who are *in Christ* as they are in the way, so are also in the truth. If they be duly joined to Christ, and abide in Him, they are in the very store-house, the very treasure-house of truth, for that truth dwelleth in Christ, and they that abide in Him, live in the palace of truth, where all truth is to be found.

Again Christ says, *I am the Life.* We can have little doubt what this means. For in various passages of the New Testament the same thing is said. "In Him was life," and the life was the light of men. "For as the Father hath Life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself." "He that hath the Son hath life," but he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

For Christ is the very source and well-spring of all spiritual life to men. Planted in Him and abiding in Him, they partake of His holy and Divine Life, of which, otherwise, they can have no share. As long as they abide in Him they have life, and bear fruit as living branches of the True Vine, and glorify God by the fruit they bear.

This then is the meaning of this great verse. If we desire to reach the Father, we must come to Christ, and be joined to Him, and abide with Him. This is the only way by which we can have either Divine life in our souls, or Divine truth in our minds, and it is by the possession of that Divine life and that Divine truth

that we become in any sort fitted for the sacred presence of our Father in heaven.

Thus Thomas, ever the doubting apostle, is answered, "Dost thou not know the way to the Father, Thomas?" Come then, and let others come to Christ. In Him they will find all truth, in Him they will find all life, which will fit them for the Father's presence. And so in Him, and abiding in Him, they will be in the way, the saving way, which will lead them, without risk of loss or failure, to the Father.

Brethren, I have been anxious to speak to you a few words upon this holy text, as I am aware that it has been twisted within these few days into an argument, why you should leave the church and go to the chapel; why you should desert the teaching of God's ordained ministers and go to that of those who have neither commission to teach nor fitness for teaching; why you should neglect and undervalue the Holy Sacraments which Christ hath given, as though Holy Baptism were not the real entrance into the kingdom of heaven, nor the Holy Communion the Divine food of the Church and of Christian souls.

I wish to give every credit to those who have done this thing, for good and pious intentions; and so far as they merely insist upon the sacred and precious importance of this blessed verse, I go with them in every

word that they say. But when they go on to say that because Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, therefore baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the Church, and the ordained ministry are good for nothing, I ask—Is, then, this verse, holy and precious as it is, the whole of the Bible? or are we to take hold of it alone, and explain it alone in such a way as to forget a hundred other verses which are equally written by the Holy Spirit of God for our good, which are therefore equally true, equally to be studied, and explained, and followed, and obeyed as this one is? Did not the Lord equally say that, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God?" Did He not direct His Apostles to baptize all nations? and did He not say to them, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved?" Did he not bid Ananias say to St. Paul, even after he had been converted by a miracle, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins?" Did He not bid St. Peter, on the very Day of Pentecost, in the very freshness and fulness of the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, to say to the crowd of believers who anxiously asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"—"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost?"

Are those who believe the Bible to be the very Word of God at liberty to overlook these things, and pass them by as if they were not written? Again, does not our Lord say that whoever eateth the flesh of the Son of Man and drinketh His blood hath eternal life, and He will raise him up at the last day?—that he that eateth His flesh and drinketh His blood dwelleth in Him and He in him?—that, as the living Father sent Him, and He liveth by the Father, so he that eateth Him, even he shall live by Him? Did He not bid St. Paul say that the cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the Blood of Christ, and that the bread which we break is the communion of the Body of Christ? and did He bid the same Apostle tell the people that they ought to discern the Lord's Body in eating that bread and drinking that wine?

Are, then, those who believe the Bible to be the very Word of the Holy Spirit of God at liberty to overlook these things, and to pass them by as if they were not written?

Again, did not the Lord Himself commission His ministers to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature? Did He not tell them that whoever despised them despised Himself? Did not the Apostle St. Paul, by His Holy Spirit, ordain elders for the people's instruction in every city? Did he not, by the same Spirit, tell Timothy, whom he had ordained, that

the Holy Spirit was given to him by the laying on of his hands with the hands of the Presbytery?

Are, then, those who read their Bible, and study it, believing it to be the very Word of the Holy Spirit of God, at liberty to shut their eyes to all those things that are written, and treat them with contempt and scorn, as though they were not?

Brethren, I embrace with all my heart and soul the blessed text on which I have been speaking. I rest with all my hope of being God's servant on earth, or reaching my sacred inheritance in heaven, upon the precious truth that my Lord Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that it is utterly impossible for any man to come to the Father but by Him. But I do not therefore shut my eyes nor my ears to other blessed and sacred words which He has left for my learning; nor do I find that those other sacred words interfere in the least degree with the full truth and blessedness of them. Though I teach that holy baptism is the entrance into the Church of God and the graces of the Holy Spirit, yet I only do so because He who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life hath taught me so. Though I speak of the sacred spiritual feeding of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Communion, yet it is no invention of mine; it is but because He who is the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life, has

told me that it is so. If I teach the doctrine of an ordained and commissioned ministry, I do so because He who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life inspired His Apostle to say that none can teach except he be sent. Which is right?—the man who holds one text as to forget a hundred others which proceed from the same authority and form part of the same Bible, or the Church which, faithfully walking in the doctrine once delivered to all the saints, compares spiritual things with spiritual, and teaches the people according to the sacred truth which she received eighteen hundred years ago, and, amid a thousand heresies, and schisms, and follies, and enthusiasms, patiently and faithfully teaches still? O brethren, believe me, the faith which the Church of God has taught for all these many years, the faith witnessed in the pious books of an hundred generations, and in which hundreds of thousands, yea millions of our fathers, have fallen asleep in Christ, and now wait, as truly alive as we are ourselves, in God's paradise, for the general resurrection of the just—that faith has not been mistaken, so far as that a hasty reading of a single text should justify men in leading others to disparage the rest of the whole counsel of God made known to men for their salvation. The glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, the noble army of Martyrs, the Holy Church throughout all

the world, have all witnessed, and many of them died to witness, that whole counsel of God, in doctrine, Sacrament, and Church order, which Christ left behind Him for our salvation. These ancient Churches, which the sober piety of generation after generation has built, repaired, renewed from time to time in their strength and beauty, from that unknown Christian man who laid the first stone of God's house in the parish of Brighstone, to the good man whose loving and ungrudging liberality and devotion brought it into its present state of soundness and beauty, in whose place I this day stand—all these witnessed in their own days, yea and they witness still in their works,—and yonder graveyard where they lie, and the sober legends of Holy Scripture which are engraved, some still legible and fresh, the tokens of recent grief and faith; some well nigh or quite worn out by age, commemorating names now forgotten and unknown, but all of men and women still alive in the paradise of God—all these, I say, witnessed in their own days, with an endless succession of faithful Christian witness, to the truth of the whole counsel of God, in doctrine, as I said, in Sacrament, and in Church order and discipline, as handed down by the Lord Himself in His Church, which He founded upon His own most precious Sacrifice. Do not be so blind as to think otherwise; do not be so mistaken as to think that these men

who try to win you away from the Church of Christ are in possession of a truth greater, holier, more saving than has saved our forefathers of a hundred generations.

Oh! my brethren, I feel earnest and eager, from the bottom of my heart, to speak to you faithfully, affectionately, and truly on this great matter. It is more serious than many think. The Lord, in the last words that He spoke before He suffered, prayed to the Father most earnestly for Unity,—that His Church might be One, One with Him, even as He is One with the Father. Is it not a grievous thing to divide that Unity? to tear the Sacred Coat which is woven from the top throughout, and which even the murderers would not rend? Is it not a sad offence against His dying love and prayer to separate from one another, and holding part of what He said to neglect the rest. Is Christ divided?

Let me not be misunderstood. That Christ is the only way, the only truth, the only life, I believe in my heart of hearts, and so long as God gives me mind to think and life to speak, I will hold it earnestly, and preach it with all my power. So also that He alone is the Door into the sheepfold,—so also that God so loveth the world that He gave His only begotten Son, to the end, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,—so also that if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved.

They are true, precious, blessed words. I embrace them,—every one who is Christian must embrace them with all his heart:—but he must also embrace and obediently follow all these other words which by the same Spirit were written, and which bid us be baptized for the remission of sins, find the food of life in the Lord's Body and Blood, listen to the Church if we would not be as heathen men and publicans, abide in the blessed Vine, if we would not be cast forth as fruitless branches to be burned. I would to God that men might by His grace listen and take heed; and as I verily believe that, with much faith and love, many do hold fast a part of the blessed revealed truth, so they would not be so wilful or so blind as to reject the rest; that so by the grace of God we might all live on earth in the unity of faith and brotherhood in Christ, and when this earth is over, find ourselves united for ever in the glorious kingdom of Christ, being acknowledged as His in His awful coming.

The Ruler of the Sea

St. Matthew viii.

27. *But the men marvelled saying, What manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey Him?*

WE are still in the Epiphany season; and Sunday after Sunday further manifestations of the Lord's Divine power and greatness are put before us in the Gospels of the day.

To-day, indeed, being the Feast of the Purification, a special Gospel and Epistle are appointed, and I might have dwelt, not without good reason, on that subject. For the Purification of the Blessed Virgin-Mother, after the birth of her Divine Son, is the model and pattern after which our own wives and mothers present themselves in the Church of God after the great pain and peril of childbirth, to give thanks to God in the presence of all His people for the great mercy vouchsafed to them in their time of trouble and distress. And the purity of that Blessed Mother and her unspeakable

happiness in her heavenly Infant, are a very touching lesson of chastity and motherly love: when the chaste and happy mother can return her honest thanks without any conscience of sin, and present her new-born child to God as an offering of her unmixed joy and thankfulness.

But I rather prefer to-day to choose the Epiphany subject, which you will find in the Gospel for the fourth Sunday after the Epiphany.

As the first Sunday after the Epiphany shewed us the Lord among the doctors at twelve years old; and the second Sunday shewed us His power in changing the water into wine; and the third Sunday shewed us how His touch cleansed the leper, and restored the paralytic; so the Gospel of the fourth Sunday shews us His power in two other signal ways: first, as commanding the sea, when the winds and the waves obeyed Him, and then, as commanding the evil spirits, and bidding them to go forth from the two poor men who dwelt, in a sort of religious madness, possessed with devils, among the tombs.

So, Sunday after Sunday, the various manifestations of the Lord's power are set forth, and we see how He ruled over all things; how the natural productions of the earth, the water and the wine, are His, and He maketh the water to flow, and the vine to root, and bud, and ripen its fruit, to put gladness into the heart of

man: how the leprosy and the paralysis, all the diseases that afflict the body of man and bring him down to the grave, are all obedient to Him, and not one of them visits us, or gives us pain and sorrow except by His will, and—if we will accept it and take it patiently—for our good; and now, to-day, how the winds and the sea obey Him, and the very evil spirits themselves only move and act as He permits them.

Let us then dwell for a short time this evening on the thought of the Lord as the Ruler of the Sea. The sound of the roar of the sea is often in our ears, brethren, and the sight of the mighty waves we are familiar with, and no doubt among a people dwelling as we do by the water side, there must be many who have dear friends, sons, brothers, fathers who go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in the great waters. It cannot be unsuitable for us to think awhile of Him whose Divine Power governeth its wildest fury, and whose mercy is as surely evinced even in the destruction which it sometimes causes, as in its mild and calm moods, when it seems to be a thing only made for beauty and pleasure.

The sea which the Lord Himself calmed by His Word when the frightened disciples cried to Him to save them lest they perished, was but a large inland lake; liable, indeed, to sudden and severe squalls, which

sometimes raised a very considerable sea, so as to render the navigation very dangerous to the small and crazy boats which then, as now, plied, chiefly for fishing, upon its waters. The mighty sea, as we know it, covers nearly two-thirds of the globe. Of this enormous mass of waters, the Atlantic Ocean, which lies between Europe and America, has long been thoroughly known as to its surface; and of late years has been hardly less thoroughly explored in its depths. By careful and systematic sounding its bottom is now so well known as to be exactly mapped: its shallower portions, its sudden precipices, its lowest valleys followed; from the shallowest ledge which borders the west coast of Ireland to the deeps not less than from three to four miles of perpendicular descent, where the Electric Telegraph was lost and recovered. The other great oceans, the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, have not been searched into in the same way; but there is reason to suppose that they are not less, but probably more deep in their deepest parts than the deepest portions of the Atlantic.

The currents, the prevailing winds, the tides, all the regularly ordered phenomena of this great ocean, we know. We know that there is a mighty river in the sea; not a river with banks of earth such as we know upon the continents, but a mighty river in the water, a river a thousand times greater than the greatest river of

the earth, which, sweeping round the Gulf of Mexico, and setting northward along the coast of America, of warm water in the midst of the cold sea, brings a warmth and vegetation and mild climate to all this part of the world, greatly beyond what is found in the corresponding latitudes of America.

We know that many of the mountains and hills which now stand high upon the earth,—the chalk downs, for instance, which we know so well as rising behind our village and running across this island, were formed by slow degrees in the stillness of a deep ocean, and upheaved afterwards by some of the mighty forces which have lifted up and varied the surface of the earth in some immeasurably distant time. And we know that even now, in the stillness of the deeps of the existing ocean, like formations are gradually growing,—perhaps to be upheaved in their turn to be the continents and islands of an altered globe.

It may seem strange, as no doubt it is unusual, to speak of these things from the pulpit;—but, brethren, the more we know about the sea, the more we shall be able to comprehend the Almighty power and the infinite goodness of Him who first created it, who still directs and guides it, under whose sovereign will it rages in storms, or sleeps in calms, by whose goodness it forms a highway for the nations of the world, bringing together

those that are most widely separated, by whose loving order its evaporation supplies the clouds, which in their turn pour down upon the earth, and make it green with fertility and richness.

He who was asleep in the storm on the lake of Galilee, and when wakened by His frightened disciples, bade the winds and the sea be still, is He who controls this mighty ocean, and turns its gigantic powers in mercy to the good of man. What could resist the strength of the sea if it should break its bounds, and in the might of its thousands of miles rush upon the land? But the Lord, He who stilled the waters of Galilee, has girded it with a little band of sand and shingle, and though day by day and twice in the day, it swells and seems as if it would pass its bounds, and rise to overflow the lands, yet, obedient to His word, the surging waves retire again, and men build upon its very verge their dwellings, secure, and trusting in the law of mercy which has given the sea its mighty powers, not for their injury and destruction, but for their blessing and benefit.

Sometimes at His word the stormy wind ariseth, which lifteth up the waves thereof. He biddeth the hurricane, the cyclone, go forth in its apparent fury, and man beholds in the terrors of the tempest the most awful image which the world presents of the power and majesty of the Most High! But even then, even in the

wildest and maddest frenzy of the winds and waves, there is an Arm that curbs them, a Will which guides them. Terrible as these things are, and sad as are the occasional disasters which they cause, yet how few are these disasters in comparison of the innumerable vessels which pursue their path in safety, and by His protecting love, reach the haven where they would be! Besides that these very storms purify the atmosphere, disperse what would be dangerous to life and health, and do themselves give occasion for the exercise of human skill and lofty courage, and to help to exalt and ennoble mankind, can there be conceived a more wonderful triumph of skill, of bravery, and of trust, than when in the wildest and darkest storm, a Christian sailor, with no guide but his needle, and no help but in his own good seamanship and God's mercy, feels cheerful and happy, nothing doubting that the same good Providence which has protected him hitherto will protect him still, and if it be for his good, will carry him through the danger, and bring him safely to his port.

No doubt in His mysterious government, it sometimes happens that fatal and dreadful losses occur: heart-breaking losses,—and the cries of widows and orphans testify to the ravages of what may seem the unpitying ocean. But the God of pity, the God of mercy is there still. He has allowed it. We cannot fathom His pur-

poses. His mysterious paths are in the great waters, and His footsteps not known. But we are sure that even these terrible things are sent in mercy. Should we not be likely to be careless and thoughtless of God, if all went always as we would have it? Should we, think you, care to pray to God for those at sea, or would those who are at sea care to pray for themselves, if the mighty ocean never raged terribly, and if none were ever swallowed up in its waves? Oh no, believe me, we need the occasional severity, the occasional judgment to keep our hearts alive to the fact that He alone rules the waters, that the winds and the sea rage but as He wills, and that there is no real safety except in trusting ourselves and all we love absolutely in His most merciful and holy hands. When we hear the storm rage and the waves roar, what is it but the voice of God saying to us, Be thou still, and know that I am God, that I will be exalted in the heaven, and that I will be exalted in the earth? What is it, but the very voice of God bidding us remember that He is infinitely powerful to save or to destroy? that if He will, He can in a moment overwhelm us, and all we have and love, in total and hopeless ruin; but that He is as merciful as He is powerful, and withholds His judgments, except for occasional warning, lest we should be proud, and forget Him, and take our own pleasure rather than His service?

Indeed, the mighty sea is a perpetual remembrancer of the power and of the goodness of Him who stilled the storm on the lake of Galilee, and who has loved us, and died for us, and of His infinite mercy made us to be His, —members of His body, sharers of His Father's love, joint-heirs with Him of His Father's heavenly kingdom.

But then, brethren, as He had done so great things for us, must we not be very much on our guard, lest by our wilfulness and sin we forfeit His blessed love and lose the salvation which He has purchased for us? Do not all these signs and proofs of His power warn us to remember with whom we have to do,—so merciful, so mighty,—so overflowing in goodness, so terrible in anger, lest by our folly and unrepentance we offend Him, whose lightest word may bring us to nothing?

The same Almighty God who rules over the sea dwells also in our hearts. But differently. In the sea,—there is not a wave, there is not a storm, there is not a calm, there is not a drop which moves otherwise than as He wills. It has no will of its own. It stirs or it sleeps as His almighty power commands.

But it is different with us. Though the Holy Spirit of our God is with us, yet we have unruly wills of our own, which He allows to move as we choose—which often forget Him, often disobey Him, often run exactly contrary to the way in which He would have them go.

The mighty sea moveth as it is bidden. We—even though the Holy Spirit be in our hearts—go astray, wandering like sheep that will lose themselves on purpose, constantly grieving Him by our sins, and provoking Him to leave us, and dwell no more in us.

Oh brethren! if we might but learn the lesson of entire obedience and submission, so that our hearts might will only as He wills, and we be as completely His servants as the sea is—that if we have our flows of joy, and our ebbs of sorrow and trouble, if we have our occasional storms of danger and fierce distress, our risks of shipwreck and death, yet in all we might be in the Lord:—in the Lord when we suffer, in the Lord when we rejoice, in the Lord when we live, in the Lord when we die. It is of the utmost possible importance to every single one among us. We have all been brought to God, been made members of His Church in Holy Baptism.—We are now on our trial. What does God see in us? Does He see hearts careless of sin,—living without thought,—living without real prayer,—living as if there were no God in Heaven, nor gift of the Holy Ghost in themselves? Or does He see in us the earnest wish and constant effort to serve Him? Does He see us often on our knees in prayer? Does He constantly hear our confession of our sins? Does He hear us cry to Him night and day continually for his helping grace? Does

He see us really trying, by His help, to put down the risings of evil thoughts that might lead to evil deeds, in our hearts? Does He see that in our secret souls we cling to Him, our Almighty Lord God, acknowledging no life nor strength save in the Father who hath made us, the Son who hath reedeemed us, and the Holy Ghost who sanctifieth us?

It is a real and most serious question, brethren, and one that concerns us all, young and old. You do not know how much time you have left to answer it in. I need not tell you that the judgment of God comes sometimes very speedily and very suddenly upon us. To-day we are well. We can hear His word. By His grace we can turn if we will. God grant that we may do so. To-morrow it may be too late.

Stewards of the Mysteries of God

1 Cor. iv.

1. *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.*

IF you look at the Prayer-book Services appointed for the second and third Sundays in Advent, you will see that they are drawn up with this view:—the second Sunday to remind us of the Holy Scriptures, as one of the great warnings of the Advent of Christ, and the third Sunday to remind us of the clergy, as set to warn us of the same great event. On the second Sunday we pray in the Collect: "Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of Thy Holy Word, we may embrace and even hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life?" On the third Sunday that, is to-day, we pray in the Collect thus: "O Lord Jesu Christ, who at Thy first coming didst send Thy

messenger to prepare Thy way before Thee, grant the ministers and stewards of Thy mysteries may so prepare and make ready Thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at Thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in Thy sight."

The particular subject, therefore, that is set before us to-day, is that the clergy, ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God, are appointed to keep Christian people warned of the coming of Christ in judgment. As John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way before the Lord when He came the first time, so the clergy are to prepare the way for Him before He comes the second time; and the way in which they are to do this is, that being ministers of God and stewards of His mysteries, they are, by His grace, to turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.

Observe then that we are here taught what is the position and dignity of the clergy; that is the first thing: let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. And the second thing is their *duty:* they must do the best they can, by God's grace, to turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. And the third thing will be the result if they be found faithful and the people willingly

receive what they faithfully teach: Christ's way will be prepared by the people being found acceptable when He returns again to judge the world.

The clergy, then are Christ's ministers. They did not make themselves so. No man, says the Apostle to the Hebrews, taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God as was Aaron. Nay, he even says that Christ Himself did not glorify Himself to be made an High Priest: but He that said unto Him, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee." Even so, the ministers of Christ do not take this honour upon themselves. They have received their call. The grace of God was given them by means of the imposition of the bishop's hands, continuing as from the first the ordination which began when, as we read in the 20th of St. John, the Lord breathed upon His Apostles, and gave to them, and in them to His ministers for all time, the gift of the Holy Ghost for the remission of sins.

There is our authority. Thus we derive the right to speak to you in Christ's Name, as His ambassadors. And I cannot understand how any man, without such authority, can be so bold as to take upon himself such an office. It is a very serious and heavy responsibility, and who, asks the Apostle, is sufficient for these things? Who of himself, can venture to stand up as the ambassador of Christ, and without authority, to speak the

words, which, as St. Paul says again, are to the one the savour of death leading to death, and to the other the savour of life leading unto life? But upon us a necessity is laid. Yea, woe will be to us, who have thus been set apart as ministers of Christ, if we preach not the Gospel. We are His ministers: to do, so far as men can do, His work: the work which He does through us. It is His work, wherever it is done: for we have no power of ourselves. Any sufficiency that we can have, and any efficiency or success that our work can have, is altogether and only His. Just as the angels are His heavenly ministers, ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation; so the clergy are His earthly ministers, bound by the sacred vow of their ordination, bound by the constraining Spirit which was given to them in their ordination, bound by the devotion to which they have pledged themselves, and the powers that have been imparted to them, to do His work, to be like Him, to go about doing good, to use their gifts whensoever, howsoever, wheresoever they can, for the Christian benefit and blessing of their brethren, over whom the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers.

Let a man then so account of us, as of ministers of Christ. But the Apostle goes on to say—and stewards of the mysteries of God. I have spoken of the clergy

as ministers of God—what does he mean further by calling them stewards of God's mysteries?

I apprehend, brethren, that the mysteries of God mean, in the first place, His Divine doctrines; the mystery which, as St. Paul says to the Romans, was kept secret since the world began, the mystery of Christ, as he says to the Ephesians, which in other ages was not known unto the sons of men as it is now revealed unto the holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit. This Divine doctrine, it is given to the clergy to preach and teach. I do not mean that it is theirs alone. I know well that all Christian people, whether they be laymen or clergymen, are alike put in possession of Christian truth, so that they may study it, talk of it, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it, but the duty of being public teachers of it, of standing up in the congregation and expounding it to the people, the duty of expressly studying it, and being the authorized men to declare it and enforce it to the best of their power, that duty belongs to the clergy, as stewards of the mysteries of God. They are stewards of it; not lords of it, not masters of it. God is the Lord and Master of it; and He puts it into their hands to teach and to distribute to their brethren. And it is required of stewards that they be found faithful, faithful on both sides, faithful to God, and faithful to their brethren, faithful to God by hold-

ing very close to the actual doctrines which He has revealed, and neither altering them, nor withholding them, nor adding to them, because men are displeased with one thing or another, or because they love another sort of doctrine or preaching better, and faithful to their brethren by laying before them, with all simplicity and truth, the very message which God has entrusted them with, saying wholesome good words to them, the very words out of which they are to derive grace and holiness, and to be kept in the way of life and salvation, not shunning to declare unto them, as St. Paul said to the elders of Ephesus, the whole counsel of God.

But the mysteries of God do not mean the doctrines of God only. They also mean His sacraments—His two great sacraments of the Gospel, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are called *mysteries*, because their nature is so Divine and mysterious. In the one case a little pure water, and in the other a little morsel of bread and wine are, by God's most mysterious working, made to be the means by which spiritual effect is wrought upon our souls. In themselves they are quite powerless. In themselves they cannot touch the soul of man at all. Neither the water, nor the bread and wine, nor the words, nor the actions of the priest, nor of any man whatever can, in the least degree, get near

to the soul of man, to touch it, or to sanctify it, or to affect it in any way. But by the grace and mercy of God He has promised to bless these things so divinely that when they are duly given and duly received, the little pure water of baptism assures us that the soul is new-born of the Holy Spirit, and the little morsel of bread and the little sip of wine convey to our souls the Divine food on which they live, the Spiritual Body and Blood of the Crucified Lord. And therefore they are called *mysteries, holy mysteries* as the Prayer Book calls them, because they have such a holy and mysterious power and efficacy.

And of these mysteries of God the clergy are made to be stewards. God has put it into their hands, and into no hands but theirs, to administer them. It is their duty to baptize with the duly consecrated water, and with the holy words, which Christ has ordained, all those who come or are brought to them for baptism; and it is their duty to seek out such as are unbaptized, and do their best to have them brought to the font of baptism, of which they and they only in the parish are the rightful stewards. God has not put that stewardship into any other hands but theirs, and they must be faithful in their stewardship.

In like manner they are made to be the stewards of the other of the two great mysteries of God, the Holy

Communion. God has put it into their hands, and into no hands but theirs to administer it. Not, God knows, for their goodness, not because of any worthiness of theirs, but because of His free choice of His stewards, He has, ever since the day when He breathed upon the Apostles and bade them receive the Holy Ghost, as you read in the 20th chapter of St. John, which was the beginning of the great power of ordination, ever since that great day, He has put it into the hands of His clergy, as stewards, to administer this His wonderful mystery, wherein they who partake duly of the consecrated bread and wine, are made, by His wonderful and most gracious power partakers of His own spiritual Body and Blood, to the feeding and sanctification of their souls.

They are stewards of it; and as stewards they must be found faithful: by which I understand that they must perform it with all the reverence and godly fear which such an holy thing demands, that they must offer it to the people often, begging them to partake of it to their soul's health and strength, that they must endeavour to do away with the idle excuses which keep men and women from coming to partake of it, that they must be like the servants of the Lord in the parable of the supper to which many were bidden, and try by all means to win them to come in, and taste and see how

gracious the Lord is in the holy feast which He has provided for them.

And here, brethren, even as I speak, I feel that my words condemn me. I feel that I have not offered you the feast of God's Holy Sacrament sufficiently often. God forgive me if taking as my rule rather what seemed to be the people's wish than the word of God, or the order of the Church, I have been an unfaithful steward of the mysteries of God in respect of this great thing. But if it be God's will that after the absence of many weeks, I should return hither and resume the active stewardship of the mysteries of God in this place, I hope to be able to increase the number of celebrations of the Holy Communion, so as to have not less than two occasions in each month on which we may meet together at God's altar, and feed our souls with that sacred food, which was never given to the angels of God, the blessed spiritual Body and Blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And who is sufficient for these things? And how could we dare, if it were not for the necessity that is laid upon us, and the sufficient grace that is promised to us,—how, I say, could we dare to undertake them? Surely it must be a strangely inconsiderate and thoughtless boldness,—not to say worse of it,—that leads some people untrained, and uncalled, without the outward

assurance of the call, made by God through men,—to take upon themselves these great and awful duties.

But I beg you to observe, brethren, that while the duty of being ministers of God and stewards of His mysteries belongs, as I have explained, to the clergy,—yet on the sympathy, on the help, and on the prayers of the people they must greatly depend if they may hope to discharge their stewardship effectually. They do but represent the Church of God in these offices, though they alone be the persons empowered by the call they have received to represent it. The offices are the offices of the whole church, though theirs be the voice to speak and to teach,—theirs the hands to administer,—whether it be the sacred water in Baptism, or the Bread and Wine in the Communion. In all these,—as in all they do,—they need, brethren, they deeply need your sympathy, your help, your prayers. They cannot do without these things. Believe me, you are stewards too, as far as this. As the steward in a household is a fellow-servant among his fellow-servants; and as his fellow-servants must support and help him, not thwart and oppose him in his stewardship, so is it also with the high stewardship of the mysteries of God. Though one man, or two men in a parish are expressly and personally stewards, yet all so far share in the stewardship, and in the responsibility of the stewardship, as they can

by every means in their power, help to give weight, and support, and strength to their work. Their responsibility is not so great, no doubt,—nor is it so particular, nor is it so constant,—but in its degree it is as real, and it can as little be denied or thrown aside and disowned.

It is not often, brethren, that a subject like this comes before us in our weekly preaching. To-day, as I have already explained, the services of the Third Sunday in Advent expressly suggest it to our thoughts.

We, ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God, are set to warn you, and to be warned ourselves, of the near approach of Christ in judgment. May we have grace to give the warning faithfully, and to listen to it in our hearts. May we have grace to be faithful in our ministry and stewardship, and may you have grace to help, to support, and to strengthen us by your sympathy, by your joint efforts in our great work, and by your prayers: that so we may, all together, clergy and lay people, alike be found, when Christ returns to judge the world, an acceptable people in His sight, Who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Ephphatha

ST. MARK VII.

32. *And they bring unto Him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech Him to put His hand upon him.*
33. *And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers into his ears, and He spit, and touched his tongue.*
34. *And looking up to Heaven he sighed, and said Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.*
35. *And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.*

WE read the account of this miracle, brethren, this morning in the Gospel for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity. Like every other part of the history of the Gospel, it affords various matter for Christian reflection, which, by God's good grace, it may be profitable to us to dwell upon this evening.

The particular case here recorded is probably not the same with any that we read of in the other Gospels. For though the Lord several times restored speech and hearing to the deaf and dumb, there are some circumstances about the present case which seem different from

any of these. Indeed, this was not, properly speaking, a case of a deaf and dumb person. You probably know that when a person is deaf and dumb, the real evil is, commonly, a want of *hearing* only: that is to say, that total *deafness* practically produces *dumbness*. One who has never heard at all does not know how to speak. He does not know what sound is, nor what it is like, nor how to make it. He is therefore dumb,—not for want of organs of speech, of tongue, or voice, or powers of articulation, but as a consequence of being and having always been entirely deaf. If the deafness were removed the form of speaking might be educated perfectly. But as long as the man continues to be entirely deaf, he becomes dumb too.

Now you observe that this sufferer was not such as this. He was deaf,—but either not totally, or not from birth; for he was not entirely dumb, but had an impediment, some organic impediment in his speech also. Very deaf and very speechless; but not altogether devoid, or at least not for his whole life, devoid of the power of hearing or speaking. This, you will see, makes this case a different one from those that we read of in St. Matthew and St. Luke.

The friends of the poor man bring him to Christ. They beseech Him to put His hands upon him. They feel no doubt either that Christ is able to restore to him

his hearing and speech, or that it will be a very good thing for him to be restored.

The Lord takes him aside from the multitude,—puts His fingers into the man's ears, spits and touches his tongue.

Observe this:—did it *need*, think you, that He should do these things? Would not His mere voice have restored the man's hearing and speaking? or, even without a word spoken, would not His mere will have done it? What, we may reverently ask, was the object with which He acted thus? Was there any virtue in the touch of the ear or the touch of the tongue, beyond the power of Him whose mere word and will had created the world and all that is in it?

I do not know for certain, brethren, what the object of this touch was,—but this I know that it warns us, that God does sometimes use what seem very small and powerless means and instruments to do His wonders of grace and love with.

Men are tempted sometimes to wonder, how the few drops of water and the few words spoken at Holy Baptism can be attended with such immense effect as we believe they have upon the souls of men. And no doubt in themselves they have no power at all, either to forgive sins or to impart the gift of the Holy Spirit. But the Lord has taught us in this miracle, as in a multitude of other

places of Holy Scripture, that we must not cavil at His use of small and apparently insufficient means. When He wills, He can work without means. When He wills, the smallest and weakest means are sufficient to work His will, and it is very bold and very presumptuous for us to limit His working, and to despise the apparent weakness of the outward means which He thinks fit to use.

And looking up to Heaven,—observe, that though He was indeed the Son of God, yet as He was also the Son of Man, He always had recourse to His Father in Heaven, and was ever heard in that He feared—a great warning, brethren, lest any person should think himself too good, or too safe, or too certain of God's favour to need continual and very humble prayers,—looking up to Heaven, I say, He *sighed*, and said *Ephphatha*, that is, *be opened.*

He sighed.

Let us pause a few moments, brethren, and think.—The friends brought their suffering friend to ask for him the Lord's healing hand,—He did not refuse their prayer. He gave them what they asked. But He sighed as He gave it: sighed, no doubt, with a sense of heaviness and pain, even while He cheered their spirits by granting the boon they asked for. *They* felt no doubts in asking. They thought they knew quite well that it would be a great blessing to their friend to be restored. The Lord knew more than they did, and He

sighed, with pain and heaviness of mind, as I said, while He granted their prayer.

Can we not apply this thought, brethren, to ourselves? We often wish for things and pray for things,—for ourselves and our friends: nothing doubting that this or that which we ask will be a great boon and blessing to us or them. Sometimes the request is denied, and we are apt to be disappointed and perhaps repining. Sometimes the prayer is granted. May not we think that sometimes the merciful Lord sighs as He grants it? knowing, what we little know, that perhaps it will turn out not for our good but for our hurt, that we should have what we have asked? foreseeing that it will bring us perhaps into temptations and dangers, which otherwise we might escape?

But the particular prayer offered in the case before us seems to suggest still more particular reflections. The sufferer in this case was deaf and well nigh speechless. The Lord gave him back both his hearing and his voice, and sighed to give them. How little the friends doubted when they prayed that the deaf might be allowed to hear, that they were asking a good thing for him! and how little they doubted it when they asked that he might speak plain! What may not the loving and Divine Lord have known!—who can conceive what a multitude of new things would be forced into the mind

of that deaf man when his hearing came back! Would they do him good? would they do him more good than harm? would they not probably bring much temptation and danger with them? Natural sounds, no doubt, the music of the earth and sea and sky,—all that could hardly be abused to evil,—all that might perhaps be set down as unmixed good,—but what of men's words, what of tales of sin, what of all sorts of evil communications? Was a man sure to be better, and please God better, and die more happily, because his restored power of hearing brought all this multitude of new things to his thoughts and knowledge? And again, his loosened tongue, was it so sure that the gift of voice so long withheld would bring him nothing but good? was it certain that the loosened tongue would always be employed in uttering good and wholesome words, and that a sacred watch would be set over the door of the lips now at last made vocal with articulate sounds?

No doubt it was in the anticipation of a future which man could not foresee that the Lord sighed even in the midst of His act of mercy, and gave the boon desired, but with fear and heaviness and distress of mind.

We, I suppose, speaking generally, have our senses perfect. Most of us can see, can hear and speak, can smell, can taste, can feel. It is a great blessing. Compared with those of our fellow-creatures who have been

deprived of any of these precious senses, no doubt our blessing is very great—so great, that we can hardly picture to ourselves the loss we should feel if we were to be suddenly deprived of any one of them. But what if any of these should turn out to be no blessing in the end to any of us, but rather a curse and a misfortune? What if, in the end, we should find that the merciful Lord had indeed need to sigh when He allowed us to be born with the sight of our eyes—for that any of us has loved to look on very evil sights, and has drunk in all manner of sin by his eyes, and turned that precious gift into the chief means of losing his soul? And what if we should find that our ears have been the very instruments of temptation and the means of sin—that we have loved to hear sounds and words that have done us hurt, and have yielded to them, so that actually if we had been deaf we might have been saved, but having had our hearing we have thrown away our hope? And so of our speech. No doubt it is a great blessing that we can speak; but surely, when we think of the way that many men speak—the falsehood, the wickedness, the mischief, the blasphemy that comes from their lips—we may well think that the Lord in His love may have sighed, when He gave them speech, to think how they were going to abuse His good and precious gift, to their own sad loss and ruin. I might say the same of taste,

of smell, and of feeling, each a precious gift, each an inlet of great and innocent pleasure in itself, but each, *too possibly*, an inlet of heavy sin, because an inlet of fresh temptation, which, if it were not for that gift, would be closed up and shut for ever.

All this, brethren, seems to me to be the natural course of reflection when we read of our Lord sighing as He gives to the poor sufferer in the text the precious gifts of hearing and speech. And I think the narrative may well set us on thinking how it may be with ourselves—whether, thinking of our own way of living and acting, our possession of all these precious senses and powers, has really been, and is, a blessing to us, so that the Lord may be thought to have given them to us in love and mercy; or whether we should rather think that He sighed in giving them, and foresaw that the eyes that He gave one man to see, and the ears that He gave another to hear, and the speech that He gave another to utter plain articulate words, would, alas! lead to much and bitter sin, and so ruin a soul which might perhaps otherwise have been saved.

But, indeed, though the narration of this miracle leads us to speak particularly of our *senses*, the truth of the lesson extends not to them only, but to every outward blessing which the mercy and lovingkindness of God has given to us. How good, and blessed, and full

of all manner of love and goodness, are all the things which God has provided for us!—our health, our strength of body, our faculties of mind, our families, our friends, our occupation, our education, the means of grace continually offered to us, the peace we live in, the orderly society, the quiet presence of law and established rights among us—all the things by which we are surrounded, which make life enjoyable and safe. Compare our state with that of millions of others in less favoured lands, exposed to the ravages of war, insecure against violence and wrong, in the midst of poverty and extreme ignorance, liable to terrible sicknesses and the like—will not the Lord, think you, call us to account for those good things which He has thus freely given to us? Does He not intend us to be better, more thankful, holier for all this? And if we are not the better and holier for it, must we not be the worse?

O brethren, believe me, God is most merciful, most loving, most tender to us; but He requires, He absolutely requires, that we should repent of our sins, and in His grace and strength obey His laws. He is very tender, very longsuffering; but His tenderness and longsuffering design to lead us to repentance. Do you think He will be tender and loving for ever, if we will not turn and give up our hearts to Him? Do you think that He will go on forbearing and forgiving without end,

if we go on sinning, and forgetting, and dishonouring Him continually? It cannot be. Even mercy itself is wearied out at last by unrepentance, and the end comes often suddenly and unexpectedly, while the sinner is presuming that he will have plenty of time yet to repent and amend, and that he need not think of God and religion yet awhile. Believe me that all the blessings which you enjoy, your bodily senses, your mental powers, everything which God has given you, is intended to help to turn you to God, not—God forbid!—to be turned into helps of evil and occasions of sin.

You must be holy if you would be saved. You must turn away from sin and repent of it heartily, if you desire to be received by Christ when He comes to judge the world.

Most melancholy would it be if the Lord, who has given us all these things, should sigh in tender sorrow over any of us, and speak as it were in words, and say, "Did I not give thee many blessings? I gave thee eyes to see, ears to hear, a tongue to speak. I gave thee health, youth, and strength. I gave thee understanding and memory. I placed thee in a fair home, and among friends. I had thee baptized in my faith. I had thee taught. I set my servant near thee, and bade him preach to thee the way of faith and repentance. What could I have done for thee more? But thou didst love

to see sights of evil, and to hear all sorts of tales of sin, and to speak words of various kinds of wickedness. Alas for thee! I bore with thee many years. I caused thee to hear many words of kindly truth and exhortation. But it did no good: thou wouldest have none of my love, nor show any of the obedience I required. Better had it been for thee if thou hadst never been born, or if thou hadst been born blind, or deaf, or dumb, or deficient in mind and intelligence, than that thou shouldest have made so sad a wreck of all thy blessings, and sinned, and sinned, and sinned without repentance unto the end."

Brethren, think of these things betimes. The night cometh, when no man can work. Now we can repent of sin, and by God's grace turn all the good things which God has given us into the blessings which He designed them to be.

To-morrow it may be too late!

The Widow of Nain

St. Luke vii.

11. *And it came to pass the day after that Jesus went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and much people.*

12. *Now, when He was come nigh unto the gate of the city, behold there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and much people of the city was with her.*

THIS narrative, brethren, tells us of one of those precious incidents which bring God into the very midst of us, and into the very heart of our common life of joys and sorrows.

We all know and believe that the great God of Heaven and earth is near us at all times, that He knows and allows all the things that happen to us, that He sees and takes note of all our thoughts, as well as of our words spoken and our deeds done,—we all know that, no doubt; and I trust we think of it often, and, by His grace come to live in the perpetual consciousness of it, feeling, as it were, His eye upon us,

looking us through and through, at every moment of our lives.

But though we know all this, it comes less home to our feeling, and seems to strike our imagination less forcibly than to read how Jesus Christ, God, the Eternal Son of God, Immanuel, moved among men, felt as a man their sorrows, felt as a man their temptations or sufferings, mingled in the very same scenes as those which we see, God indeed, but Man also: true Man in the true weakness of man's body, and the true sympathies of a man's soul, though Himself the Eternal Son of the Most High God, by Whom Heaven and earth were made.

It comes, I say, less home to our feelings to know of the Almighty God invisible, and known only by our faith, than to think of God shedding human tears of private love to witness the deep grief of the sisters of Lazarus His friend,—of God weeping with the bitter tears of patriotic or public love over the doomed city of Jerusalem,—of God, sitting among His faithful disciples, and bidding them as His last command to continue to eat that bread and drink that cup of life in remembrance of Him,—of God, stretching out His loving arms of mercy upon the Cross, and drawing all men visibly unto Him, by giving His life to be a sacrifice for their sins; or, to come closer to the particular narrative of the

Gospel for this day, of God,—meeting the sad company that issued from the gate of the little city of Nain, and with the true heart of a man, with the voice of a man, with the touch of a man, with the deep compassion of a man veiling the almighty power of God, bidding the widowed mother weep not.

It is not difficult to realize the scene. The little city, or, as we should call it, the country town, with its gate and walls. As the travellers, a company of thirteen men on foot, draw near, they see a funeral procession coming from the gate to bury their dead outside of their city, according to their practice. There was but a single gate to Nain,—that which opens on the rough hillside on its downward slope to the plain. The corpse, swathed round very tightly with strips of linen, which first bound the limbs one by one, and then altogether, the head being separately covered, lay upon an open bier, which was carried by the nearest friends, and such as desired to do honour to the dead. Behind it came the widowed mother; the widowed mother just bereft of her only son;—both she and he, it would seem, well known and respected in the little town. She,—feeling more bitterly alone, no doubt, for friends that pressed officious round,—the friends,—a large company,—much people,—full of tender sympathy,—remembering her husband, remembering well her poor boy, much touched with her

double loss, and complete loneliness,—intending, at least, all that was kind,—and she appreciating their kindness even while, it may be, she might have rather desired to be alone. The elements of the scene, brethren, are well known to us all. They are not confined to that rough hillside, or that little city gate. They are as universal as men and women are. They are to be found wherever men and women live, and fathers and mothers live in honourable marriage, and sons and daughters are in such honourable marriage born, and live and die in love and peace with one another.

The procession comes down the slope, up which, as I said, the thirteen wayfarers were toiling: when one of the thirteen, not to be distinguished from the rest by any difference as of dress or appearance, but plainly having authority of a strange and wonderful kind, moving forward from his company and speaking to the sad mother as she walked by the side of the body overpowered with tears, had compassion on her and said "*Weep not.*"

It was no common interruption. The people felt it was not. It might have seemed so if he had been a common man. It might have seemed like an ordinary expression of a passenger's attempt at comfort. But they felt at once that this was no ordinary case. The bearers stood still at once. The procession halted. The

mother, bowed as she was to the ground, lifted her head. There was surely something among them very wonderful,—more than human,—something that went to all their hearts,—surprising and cheering them.

And He came,—came quite close, and touched the bier,—they that bare it were standing still,—and He said, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise; and he that was dead, sat up, and began to speak." Can you not imagine the mixed fear and wonder, the awe and delight of the people, as they pressed to unwind the swathing bands, and loose his limbs, hardly believing the truth of what their eyes saw and their ears now heard? And He delivered him to his mother. He gave him back loosened from the bonds of death, well, no doubt, in health and strong, restored not only from the death which had held him, but also from the disease which had killed him, and gave him back to his mother; to her who loved him best and leaned upon him most; to her with whose grief He had sympathized, not more, we may well believe, than now He sympathized with her joy. He gave her boy back into his mother's arms.

Brethren, these incidents of our Lord's life and goodness are inexpressibly tender. Even if we had no more to do with them than to read of them as of things long past by, and only as indications of the true human love and sympathy of Him Who is our Lord in heaven, and

will hereafter be our Judge, they would be unspeakably precious to us, as assuring us of His tender human love, which is so great a part of our stay and comfort in the midst of all earthly sorrow and distress.

But I venture to say confidently that we have a great deal more to do with them than this. I venture to say that He who stayed the funeral procession at the gate of Nain, who bade the weeping mother stay her tears, and gave her back her son,—is not less truly present at our funeral processions as we bear the bodies of our dead at the gate of our own churchyard,—is not less tender to the mothers weeping for their children, to bid them check their tears,—gives them no less certain assurance that He will, not indeed in the flesh, but when the days of the flesh are done, restore them again to one another. I venture to say, not only of this incident, but of every such incident in the life of our blessed Lord and Saviour, that it is meant to be a picture and a pattern of that which He is, and that which He says, and that which He does in all the like cases to His people in the world. As immortal, as eternal as Himself, are the words that He spake and the deeds that He did during the three years of His earthly ministry among men. The same everlasting Lord, God and Man, God in power, Man in love, God in mercy, Man in sympathy, is with our weeping sisters as at Bethany, with our distressed fathers as

on His coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration, or at the house of Jairus the ruler of the synagogue, with our poor afflicted women, as He was with the poor creature that came behind Him in the press and thought to steal a cure unperceived by touching the hem of His garment,—with our widows and our bereaved mothers as He was with the poor widow woman to whom he gave back her boy on the rocky slope of Nain.

Yes, brethren, it is most true; and it is most consoling. But we must not be too hasty. We must not administer our comfort without adding to it one necessary caution. Religion is not all softness. God is most merciful. Christ is most loving. But is God merciful to them who despise His mercy? Is Christ loving, and will He be loving to the end, to those who will have none of His love, and reject His law?

You know well that He will not; and speaking as His faithful ambassador and priest, I must not mislead you, as if He merely loved with a sort of feeble and undiscriminating love, sinner and saint, penitent and impenitent, faithful and unfaithful, all alike, as if there were no difference, as if there were no terms nor conditions attached to His most free and loving mercy.

Let us come closer to the tale of the poor widow of whom we have been speaking. I have said that as Christ comforted her, so He does still comfort mothers

afflicted in like manner. Most true—but stay a moment—they must be faithful mothers, Christian mothers, earnest religious mothers. What shall I say if the poor weeping mother among us became a mother against the law of God as well as against the law of man? if the child she weeps for is the memorial of unchaste passion and notorious sin? May I say to her, He who bade the poor widow weep not at the gate of Nain, has sent me to say to you too, Weep not, for I will deliver your son to you again? May I say so to her—is it not saying peace to her when there is no peace—unless her sin be first probed, her repentance for her sin real, her sorrowing faith, like that of the poor penitent woman in the Gospel, shewn by her much love and her many tears?

Is this not a sore, a very sore affliction among us, brethren? Sore to the heart, very sore to the touch: should I, think you, be faithful to the Lord who bids me speak, or faithful to the loving Lord who spoke these words of love to the widow of Nain, if, out of timidity or false delicacy, I refrained from touching it? Believe me, such grief has no comfort, unless there be a very true and deep repentance, proving itself by a life of holy and earnest religion.

But again, the poor widow of Nain had lost her only boy. I dare to say, brethren, I dare to say with con-

fidence, that he was a good and religious boy; and what is more, I dare to say with confidence that after he was raised from the grave and restored to his mother, he was a good and religious boy still. I venture to affirm that Christ did not raise him from the dead to lead a life of sin, and to be lost at the last. And the comfort which Christ gave to that mother is still the comfort which He gives, and bids us who are His ambassadors to give in His name, to the bereaved mothers among you. But must not the comfort go with the goodness? Does the sweet comfort go with every mother who has lost her child? or does it not only belong to those who have bred up their children in holy God-fearing ways? Are we at liberty to say to the poor mother who is weeping at the grave of a son who has been leading a bad life, an unclean, a dishonest, an idle, or in any way an irreligious life, without repentance, Weep not, poor bereaved mother, Christ will give you back your boy in a better life? Can we say so? Is it true? Does this lesson come out of the Lord's blessed words of mercy at the gate of Nain? You know it does not. Let us not deceive ourselves so far as to think it does.

No: we all know quite well, that is, in our hearts we know, however much in our lives we are tempted to forget it, that the mercy of God in Christ, the precious inestimable mercy of God in Christ, belongs to those and

to those only who repent of their sins, who believe with all their hearts and who obey. The offer is as free, as open as the air of heaven. No sin is so heavy, no conscience so burthened, but if it come to Christ in penitence, in faith and in obedience, He will welcome it, love it, restore it, save it. But we must come in penitence, in faith, and obedience, or we have nothing to do with that love or that mercy. It is not offered to those who forget God, who live in sin, or who cover up their sin. It is not offered to those who sin on easily and carelessly, doing as they please, never trying by earnest prayer and Holy Communion to cherish the gift of the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

But, if we will repent, if, however sad and melancholy have been our falls into sin, we will yet repent while God gives us time, do not doubt for one moment that God will hear our contrite and earnest prayer. There is no sound that reaches Heaven so swiftly or certainly as even the feeblest voice of repenting prayer.

We desire, we hope to meet again when this world is over. It is the ordinary topic of Christian comfort when Christians are called upon to part with those whom they love upon the earth, that in Christ they shall meet in a better place. Well! but never forget, brethren, never for a moment forget that that blessed comfort presupposes that both he who is taken away, and the

survivor who accepts the comfort, are penitent and faithful. It is most true of them; most true, most blessedly true of them: but of those who die impenitent and unfaithful it is *not true.*

The young man of Nain was given back to his mother's love. It was for a time only. After a while, he fell sick again, and died a second time; he and his widowed mother both.

Our sick friends are sometimes given back to our prayers. I think that when a child of ours recovers from a severe and dangerous illness the responsibility of a parent's care seems to be deepened. Had he been taken then, in infancy, in innocence, he probably was in the love and favour of God. Oh, if he should be restored to health in answer to our prayers, and then lost after all—oh, if the happpy mother receiving back her child, should then neglect to breed him up in all good discipline, in all purity, in all religion! Think of the terrible woe, if such a mercy which spared the earthly life of a child should in the end lead to the loss of his heavenly life, and both child and parent mourn for ever over the sad blindness and sin which had turned what seemed the greatest of blessings into the heaviest of all possible evils!

But if we will repent:—if we will be in earnest: if we will pray earnestly, and submit our secret hearts and

wills to the sanctifying Spirit of the most High God, then let us be assured that He who showed His compassion and His power at the gate of Nain is not less with us in our sorrows. We may give our darlings to the grave. But our hearts know they must not break. Why should they? Does not faith lift them up? Does not the Holy Spirit who gives the faith, show them the Saviour? Do they not feel in their heart of hearts the assured certainty that they shall meet again in Heaven? not as the boy of Nain was given back to his mother for a few short years and a second death, but for endless life that knows no further parting, life and glory with Christ eternal in the heavens.

Only, brethren, let this word ring clearly in all our ears. Those blessed promises are for the penitent, the faithful, the obedient: and they are for none besides.

Josiah's Discovery of the Law

2 KINGS xxiii.

1. *And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem.*
2. *And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great, and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord.*

THE event which we read of in this chapter, brethren, the chapter which has been read as the first Lesson for this evening's service, is one of a very remarkable kind and well worthy of our dwelling upon it, and trying to draw some useful lessons to ourselves from it.

The king of Judah was Josiah, the son of a most wicked father. But his father had been slain when he was only eight years old, and he had been from that time acknowledged as king. He must have been well brought up as a boy; for we read that in the eighth year of his reign,* when he was only sixteen years old,

* Cf. 2 Chron. xxxiv.

he began to seek after the God of David, his father; and in the twelfth year, when he was twenty, he began to make a great reformation. The high places, the groves, the carved and molten images, the altars of Baal, were thrown down, not in Jerusalem only but in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali,—and then, having cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem.

This work done, and effectually done, he turned his thoughts toward the repair of the great temple in Jerusalem, which in the reigns of the wicked kings who had preceded him had fallen into considerable decay. For this purpose he had gathered large sums of money from the remnant of the tribes of the kingdom of Israel; and from the still flourishing tribes of the kingdom of Judah,—and he set to work in earnest,—it was now the eighteenth year of his reign, and he was twenty-six years old—to repair the temple which had stood three hundred and seventy years since it was finished in its great beauty and solemnly dedicated by King Solomon.

He set to work I say in great earnest, helped by the high priest Hilkiah; and all the workmen we are told in stone and in timber, did they work faithfully.

And now, in the midst of the work, a most strange and wonderful thing occurred.

Hilkiah the priest found—somewhere hidden away and forgotten—the book of the law of Moses.

Hidden away and forgotten for near three hundred and seventy years, there came to light all of a sudden the book of the law of Moses. It is not unlikely that it may have been the actual original book as first written and kept in the ark according to the direction given in the book of Deuteronomy, but at any rate it was an ancient copy of it, a copy as old as the building of the temple at least; and wonderful to say, neither the high-priest, nor the king, nor any of the people of that generation, nor of many generations before them, had ever seen a copy of it in all their lives before!

It is well-nigh impossible to conceive the wonderful and astonishing neglect which could have led to such a thing as this.

The chosen people,—priding themselves on being the descendants of Abraham, always referring to their great lawgiver Moses, to their deliverance from Egypt, to the miracle which led them dry-shod over the Red Sea, to the wandering in the wilderness, the law given from Mount Sinai, and the inheritance of the promised land; verily believing themselves to be the chosen and favoured people of God, from among whom the Messiah was to be born to be the King of all the world; and yet this people, being in possession of the written law of

God, which was full of all the directions which God had given to Moses, by obeying which they were to continue to be in His favour and love, this very people, I say, had lost, actually, totally, lost for the best part of four hundred years, the Book of God altogether. I cannot say when they lost it:—no doubt they lost it, so to say, by degrees:—neglected it first, forget it afterwards, and then lost it quite. There was no copy left. Nobody knew of it. Nobody cared for it. Nobody had ever seen it. Nobody wished for it, for nobody missed it. They went on from day to day and year to year, as proud and confident as ever in their possession of God's favour, and yet the very charter of that favour, in which were written all the conditions on which that favour was to be retained, was gone, lost, forgotten; for aught they knew, utterly destroyed without the possibility of recovery.

And then, of a sudden, while the good high-priest was superintending the faithful work that was going on in the Lord's house, in some out-of-the-way corner he came upon a book—a strange book—he had never seen the like before. What could it be? He looked at it with curiosity—with interest—with momentarily deepening interest. It was—he could not doubt it—it was the actual book of the law of God! the book that they had heard of but had never seen! had perhaps

not thought of to care to see: but there it was, and his were the happy hands into which, by the good providence of God, it had fallen.

Yes, providentially, it had fallen into good hands, and had been discovered at a good time. It might have been in Amon's reign or Manasseh's. It might have been at a time when men would be tempted to destroy or make away with a document that condemned them; but the nation seemed now in earnest about better things. Prince, priest, and people seemed to be taking with all their heart to a godly reformation.

Hilkiah read it—with what feeling of awe, surprise and admiration we may conceive, to think how the book had been forgotten, and to find how grievously its commands had been disobeyed.

He read it, and made it known to Shaphan, the chief of the scribes, the official interpreter of the very law, the writing of which he had never seen. Shaphan read it also.

And then they took it to the young king; and Shaphan read it aloud in his ears. And the king, young, earnest, and full of eagerness to do right, was greatly moved. So he "sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem

with him, and the princes, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord. And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant."

It must have been a most striking and wonderful scene. And it bore some fruit. For not only did the king proceed more vigorously to put down all remains of idolatrous worship in all parts of his dominions, but he and his people celebrated the Feast of the Passover, in the strictest and closest obedience to the newly discovered law, as it had never been celebrated during all the reigns of all the kings, nor since the prophet Samuel.

But, alas! it was for a time only, even as far as it went. In thirteen years more the young king was slain in battle, and then all the troubles which were withheld during his reign, because his heart was tender, and because he had humbled himself before the Lord, broke upon the nation in the reigns of his unworthy sons. Strange, brethren, how often it happens that men who are for the most part good and pious themselves, fail to

bring up their sons and daughters to follow in their steps, but the pious father has to mourn (yes, and to humble himself, for it must needs be much his own fault) over a wicked and good-for-nothing son, and an earnest godly mother over a wild and unchaste daughter!

And, I said,—even as far as it went. For though the idolatry was put down, and the Passover restored, yet still we find that the law of the Sabbath and the Sabbath-year was not observed, and that the Feast of Tabernacles was not restored according to the law for about one hundred and fifty years later, after the return of the people from their seventy years' captivity.

I suppose, brethren, that when we first read and hear of these things, we are generally inclined to feel extreme surprise—indignant surprise—at the blindness, the folly, and the wickedness of the Jews. To think that they were living under a written law of God,—on the possession of which they prided themselves so highly as the most favoured nation in all the world,—and yet that they lost the law for hundreds of years, and for hundreds of years forgot and omitted many of its chief and most characteristic rites:—forgot the Passover, forgot the Sabbath, in some at least its important particulars if not in all, forgot the way of celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles, forgot I know not what besides! Could folly, could blindness, could wickedness go further?

But, brethren, our loathing were but lost on dead men's crimes and Jews' idolatries, and we must remember that we have the whole history of the Jews under our eyes at once. We read on, and scores of years and hundreds of years slip by under our eyes in a few pages. But what it takes so little time to read was very long in really passing; and while we are shocked to see how soon and how completely they seem to fall away, you must remember how easily small neglect leads on in the course of years to great neglect, and how children born and brought up after the neglect is begun, propagate it to their children, and so the degeneracy gradually grows greater and greater, till when a certain number of years is passed, the nation may have slid down, almost imperceptibly, to any degree of forgetfulness and real apostacy.

The nation did not suddenly plunge, by one act of will, into all this wickedness. No nation ever does. It seldom happens that single people do. No; it is the gradual neglecting; the dropping one thing after another; the not caring to keep up to the high standard; the easy, contented way of thinking what *will do*, what is as good as what other people do, and the like, which in the course of years—which are as a day in the sight of God—may bring a nation down, no one can say how far, in the road to godlessness and ruin.

And this it is which makes the lesson so grave a one to us.

It is about three hundred and fifty years since, by the blessing of God, His written Christian law, the Bible in English, became the property of all the Christians in England; and thanks to His Providence which has given us the art of printing, copies of the Bible are now innumerable; and there is no danger of their ever being so lost as the old law of Moses was in King Josiah's days. I suppose that there are certainly not less than two hundred, perhaps a good many more, copies in this parish. Well, but it is possible to starve in the midst of abundance, if there is no will nor appetite to eat. The Bible on your shelf never read is little better to you than the Bible lost.

Again, the people in King Josiah's time had either quite forgotten the Passover, or at least celebrated it very imperfectly, so that it had to be begun, as it were, anew. I apprehend, brethren, that three hundred and fifty years ago it was quite a rare thing for confirmed people to stay away from Holy Communion. How is it now? Have we not slid far away since the days when all, or nearly all, were in good earnest to obey the written Law which tells us that, unless we eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, we have no life in us, and that bids us, by eating that Bread and drink-

ing that Cup, show forth the Lord's death till He come again in judgment?

Again, the people in King Josiah's time constantly neglected the Temple, and set up high places of their own. Three hundred and fifty years ago there was not such a thing known as *dissent*, and such neglect of the Church of God as we now know. No doubt there was much disputation and difference, and the great division of Roman Catholics and Protestants agitated the country from one end to the other. But the great evil of the religious aspect of the present times, the sects, the fanaticism, the meeting-houses, the pretence of teaching on the part of those who have neither call nor qualification, the breaking up of the people into little unauthorized and self-constituted congregations—all this has grown up since as a fruit of continually aggravated indifference and neglect.

Now it is in all these ways that the lesson of what happened in King Josiah's days seems to apply so closely to us. There is, I do not doubt, a great deal of religion, personal religion, among us; so, I have equally no doubt, there always was, even in the worst of times, among the Jews. But the generations hardly seem to grow better. Many of the older people, as they grow older, begin to think more seriously, and endeavour to turn to God before they die. But the old evils still go

on, and the younger ones do not seem to be brought into the godly ways in youth, which would signify real reformation. Still the old dangers seem to get head. Idleness, unchastity, Sabbath-breaking, bad society—if we really want to amend our ways, and bring our people back to God, from whom they have so far departed—these are the things that have to be set to rights; fathers and mothers breeding up their boys and girls in pious and holy ways, showing them good examples at home, and exercising a real control over them when they come to be old enough to be in danger of breaking away into serious and fatal sin.

And all this time we are very well contented with ourselves. We pride ourselves that we are Christians; we pity those who have not heard of Christ, and often give our money and help to send missionaries among them; and it is well done. But what is to be said if our own parishes and our own families are only half-Christian in their way of living? We hope to do something to help the poor Africans of Zululand to own Christ and to serve Him; but, alas! hardly one in twelve of us cared enough for Christ to come this morning to the holy feast which He has Himself invited us to. We hear tales of heathen vice, and are eager to bring the poor ignorant people to a sense of Christian purity and virtue. Must I venture to allude to the like sub-

ject at home, and ask whether it is an uncommon thing in a Christian village—yes, a village more than one thousand years Christian—to know of children born, not in holy wedlock, but in grievous sin?

Yet I do not know that all this makes us unhappy, as it ought to do, and sets us, fathers, mothers, neighbours, friends, upon the earnest efforts at general reformation which are needed. No. I imagine that, on the whole, we are not ill-contented with ourselves, nor disposed to think that we have any need of any searching or thorough repentance and reformation.

But how must God be looking at us all this time? How do we stand in His sight? Will He be satisfied with us because we are contented with ourselves?

O brethren, would that His Holy Spirit might so touch our hearts with the grace of deep and true repentance, that we might not be satisfied with all this half-service, which continually slips further and further away from the devotion which He requires, but with true hearts, and real earnestness of spirit, learn to give ourselves up to Him in His holy Church on earth, that He may acknowledge us as His when He returns to judgment.

The Invisible World: Angels

St. John i.

51. *And He saith unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.*

THIS is one of those passages of Holy Scripture, brethren, in which a slight change in the meaning of a word between the time of the translation of the Bible into English and the present, has obscured the meaning of the text. There are a good many instances of the same kind, which those who read the Scriptures in the original are familiar with. They are sometimes of less consequence, sometimes of greater. In the present case, the change has been a considerable loss, for I imagine that it has operated to keep somewhat out of the sight of English readers a great and blessed truth.

"*Hereafter*" ye shall see Heaven opened. What time is meant by the word "*hereafter?*" Usage, arising I believe from an unfortunately very common contrast

between *here* and *hereafter*, has had the effect of throwing forward the meaning of the word "*hereafter*," till it is understood to mean *the next world*,—some time far future: anyway *not the present:* for the present time and place are meant by *here:* and *hereafter* seems to signify a time and place different from the present, and not to begin till *here* is past.

I might illustrate this by quotations of every kind; but there is no need. Suffice it to say that this is *not* the meaning of hereafter, either in the Bible or the Prayer Book. The antithesis between here and hereafter which has warped the sense of it, is of later growth than that simple age. In the Bible and Prayer Book it means "from this time forward," "immediately," "beginning now," from this very moment. You will find it in this sense in the Confession and the Absolution in our daily prayers, and eminently in this great verse of St. John.

The "hereafter" when the good and holy angels of God are busy ascending and descending upon the Son of God, serving spirits, ministering to those who are heirs of salvation in Him, is not a distant future taking place I know not where, and beginning I know not when, but it is now; it has begun already; it began when the Lord came; it had begun when the Lord spoke these words, and pointed them with that emphatic

"Verily, verily," which always introduces some truth of signal importance. Even now, from that old day forward, now,—yes, in the midst of this forgetful and unspiritual world, the holy angels are ascending and descending, doing, in the strength and by the mission of God, good helpful works of ministration to the Church the Body of Christ. How far each one of us baptized into Christ has his own guardian, to whose care he is specially given, I cannot venture to say with confidence; but no person who considers what our Lord says in the tenth verse of the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew, can venture, I think, to be confident in denying it.

To a very great many people, it is to be feared, and that even in a Christian country like this, the Invisible World, and the beings by whom it is peopled, are as if they were not. They recognise very clearly the importance and interest of all the things which they can see with their eyes. They are very busy with the tangible things that are round about them; but for things invisible, for things spiritual, they have neither care, nor hardly belief. They think it idle and trifling to talk or think of such things. Even the souls of the dead, really alive as we know them to be, alive in their own place as truly as we are alive upon the earth, are to them *no more*, absolutely *no more:* but the other beings, the good and evil angels, the one continually doing the commands

of God and ministering to the heirs of salvation, and the others permitted to try and tempt men from their allegiance,—of these they seem to take no account at all, hardly troubling themselves so far as distinctly to disbelieve in their existence, but practically putting all thought of them entirely out of their minds.

It is very good for us sometimes to be called to think soberly and seriously of the Invisible World: soberly, I say, and seriously; for in spite of the indifference and general unbelief of men to such things, of which I just now spoke, there is much commonly said and thought about them which is neither sober nor serious. For in truth God's great Invisible World is so near us, and its mysteries surround us so closely,—and our own minds, though outwardly hardened and blinded by earthly things, are still so capable of being inwardly stirred and agitated by them, that compatibly with all this indifference there exists an immense deal of unregulated and mischievous superstition respecting them. Silly tales of witchcraft,—these mostly, among the most ignorant, —all kinds of tales of ghosts and apparitions,—foolish and wicked notions of communication with the spirits of the dead, which if they were possible (which they are not) would be unlawful and unholy,—all these, we well know, are strangely common even in these days of blindness respecting things really spiritual. For the

mind of man cannot by any effort of unbelieving will close itself absolutely against spiritual things. People may be as brave and unbelieving as they will, but they cannot barricade themselves altogether against God's mighty Invisible World; and if they will not open themselves to the wholesome and ennobling thoughts which Holy Scripture puts before them on this subject, they are sure to be more or less a prey to unreasonable fancies and fears. Believe me, there is not one of the most worldly and least spiritual of men, who, if something were to occur to himself, which he should fully believe to be a supernatural communication from the Invisible World, would not be altogether dismayed, and shaken to the depth of his soul by the occurrence. Once let the defence—the easily scaled outwork of incredulity be surmounted, and the worldly heart is utterly unprotected against the wildest attacks of superstition and fear. His only defence was unbelief,—let the unbelief be suddenly broken through, and there is no strength whatever left to do battle against the most unreasonable terrors.

But the Holy Scriptures open to such as will simply read, and learn, and faithfully digest them, a most sublime and exalting view of the great world of Beings which we cannot see with our eyes. Angels doing the work and service of God in a wonderful order; sur-

rounding the throne of God with veiled faces and feet; never weary of singing the praise of Him who sitteth thereon; doing battle with the evil spirits; pouring out the vials of God's wrath upon sinful nations; camping round about the righteous, guarding the little ones, ministering in all holy ways to the heirs of salvation; most holy, most pure, most loyal, most loving, rejoicing to welcome the first words of penitence in one sinner that repenteth, refraining from all hard words, rendering to God the perfect service of their exalted nature,—the angels in unknown number,—in order subordinated to one another, executing God's will in the inanimate world of nature no less than in the souls and bodies of His people,—so that neither star nor comet, neither war nor pestilence, neither famine nor fruitful seasons, visit the earth without their loyal and mighty agency: —evil spirits, allowed to roam about the world and tempt men with sorrow and affliction as Satan tempted Job, to sift them as wheat as he sifted the Apostles, suggesting evil thoughts as he suggested to Eve, occupying (where men yield themselves to his power) the bodies and souls of men, one, or on relapse seven, or a legion; yet all their power to do harm absolutely limited by the permission of God and the wilful consent of man:—the souls of the dead in their separate places, the good in the paradise of the just, and the impenitent

in the chains and darkness of the lost angels, waiting, with no indistinct or uncertain anticipation, for the final Judgment of the Last Day:—all these, we verily believe, on the most assured word of Holy Scripture, TO BE, as truly, as really, as undoubtedly, as we who see one another with our eyes, and seem to be alone and have this world to ourselves. And it is well and good that we should think of them, and realize them to our customary imaginations. How can any person have vain and idle horrors of unknown spiritual things who has accustomed himself to feel and know that, by day and night, in sunlight and in darkness, what seems solitude is really no solitude at all,—that not only the Omniscient God is there, but that His good angels too are ever by, studious and most able to help him, to drive away all evil, and to be his best and mightiest friends, if he will render himself up to be God's true servant, and follow as He guides? Who would shake with helpless terror at the thought even of the visible appearance of the spirits of the dead, if he were strong at all times in the firm conviction that all that invisible world is no less under the fatherly control of God than those outward things that we see, and that to the servants of God whatever happens, happens for their good, —and that, any way, if our eyes were opened like the prophet's in Dothan, we should see that they which are

for us are many more and much more powerful than those which are against us?

But all these, as you know, brethren, are very common terrors, very common indeed with the young, and by no means unknown or forgotten by the old. Learn then to think continually of the good angels, and be sure that to those who do so habitually, who try to be good, and whose lives are lives of prayer, it is not difficult to lift their minds to a high and holy serenity, and to have their thoughts so familiar with the truth of spiritual things, that they may not be shaken to pieces with terror at the idea of confronting, if it should please God, even while they remain in the flesh, beings whom they must assuredly meet face to face ere long, when they depart out of the flesh and are no more seen upon the earth.

But it is not only for the purpose of driving away nightly fears and superstitions that we are to think of God's holy and good angels. They are made also to be the express objects and patterns for our imitation. For when the Lord teaches us to pray, *whenever we pray*, that His will may be done on earth as it is done in Heaven, what else does He teach us than to make the blessed, cheerful, active, loyal obedience of the angels the very model of the obedience which we are to pay upon the earth? How then chiefly do the angels obey? and what are the main offices of obedience which they

are represented in Holy Scripture as rendering to their God and ours?

First and mainly, they praise God: never tiring, never omitting, singing willing, loyal praises to Him whom it is their greatest glory to honour with hymns around His throne. Then we imitate the angels expressly when we praise God. In our hymns, in our psalms, when we lift our voices to chant, especially in that one hymn in which we sing the very words of angels and archangels, and of all the company of Heaven, saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts," we are directly copying and actually joining in the chief work of the angels. No doubt, for fallen, feeble, sinful men and women the sad tones of penitence, of confession, the whispered words of secret prayer, the silent tears of humble remorse and sorrow, are most fitting, most necessary, and shall be most blessed—blessed with pardon, restoration, peace, and strength; but God forbid that the redeemed in Christ should ever be afraid or ashamed to lift their voices in the glad acclaim of holy, thankful, exulting songs, or that these ancient piles, each of which contains, as it were, in its very stones memorials of the piety of near a thousand years, should ever cease to echo with the glorious harmony of united voices to which they have been accustomed, in which they have, as it were, been set up and builded,

so that the harmony be not of the voice only but of the heart, not the mere tinkling of the cymbal, but the utterance of that love to God and man which is greater even than faith and hope.

Then, they serve God actively, loyally, and continually, in all sorts of works on which they are sent, His agents in the material as in the moral world, going to and fro in power, and discharging all kinds of offices in prompt and perfect obedience. We imitate them herein when we bend ourselves to our various works of duty upon the earth, duties hard or easy, duties of work, or lighter duties of recreation, willingly acknowledging and accepting all the things which in our various stations come to our hands to do, and doing them with all our might. Then, if there be any works which they love best, and which are most characteristic of them, they are the gentle, yet powerful helping of the little ones, meaning by that term Christ's faithful people, who are all weak and little as compared with their own high and unendangered goodness—ministering in all unseen ways to the heirs of salvation, comforting them in temptation and affliction, as they ministered to their Lord and ours after the Temptation and the Agony—taking care of them, loving them, flying to them bright and fresh from the face of our Father which is in heaven—rejoicing over the first breath of repentance in those who have sinned.

And all this we may imitate abundantly if we will, in endless works of charity and love to one another; teaching, helping, comforting, supporting those who are in danger of falling; keeping as far as we can temptation out of their way, not disdaining to condescend to offices for them which may be in themselves unwelcome; loving, and acting in love towards them for Christ's sake, their king and ours.

Remember too how they do battle with evil, and yet how meekly, in their strength, they refrain from hard words or railing accusations, even against the very prince of evil.

And in these days of bitter tongues and hard words, hardly less bitter and hard, alas! on the side of truth, sometimes, than on the side of error, we shall imitate them best, if in our continual and unending strife with evil and wrong, we too are known for our meek and pure speech, which is not the weaker, but much the stronger in its real force of resistance, because it does not waste itself in the feeble bitterness of outward talking.

I know not where in this world a brighter imitation of the glorious meekness, the gentle victoriousness of the angels can be better shown than in the Christian strength of an earnest, high-souled Christian young man or woman. He draws his strength from a Source

higher and more divine than any to which even angels have access—the holy indwelling of the Spirit of God, given in baptism, given more and more in answer to every faithful prayer, given richly in His sevenfold gifts in confirmation, strengthened and assured to him in every faithful and penitent communion of the Lord's Supper. When then he, so sacredly fed and supported, in the full strength of his young manhood, body and soul in their full fresh powers, turns himself resolutely away from the low and debasing things which mislead and ruin so many—loves the praise of God above all things—throws himself in all the beautiful strength of youth, unbetrayed by self-indulgence, into every comely work and duty that belongs to his place in life—does battle meekly, but in Divine strength, against evil, of word, or act, or fashion—helps, encourages, supports those who are younger, feebler, less resolute in goodness—abashes and puts down, like God's good warrior, with a generous and victorious indignation, all such things as would encourage sin among them—is meek in his strength, because he knows that he himself is but very weak and sinful, and that whatever strength he has is not his own, but God's—when, I say, a Christian young man, in whatever position in life, at school, at college, in his regiment, in his ship, in his counting-house, in his shop, in his labour in the field, in his

family wherein he is, lives and acts so—and so all may do who are in the Body of Christ and have been made to drink into the one spirit—then he exhibits the noblest and purest picture that this world can shew of God's holy angel-warriors, who so nobly, so meekly, so untiringly do His bidding.

Brethren, the thought of the holy angels of God thus constantly presented to us in the Scripture is really a most ennobling as it is a most comforting thought. In our extremest loneliness, in our lowest depression, in our heaviest pains, if we be in earnest in throwing ourselves at God's feet in faithful penitence, the angel is surely by to comfort us. In the hour of death, he does not leave the spirit of the just to sink unsupported with the sinking body. He is by us in our more cheerful moments, as well as in our graver ones. He is by us when we sleep or wake in the darkness of the night. We cannot pass our guardian angel's bound.

We sometimes think that the angels were among men in the old times, when they visited and blessed Abraham, rescued Lot, wrestled with Jacob, spoke to Manoah, and in various ways took visible part in the lives of the Patriarchs. And, no doubt, *visibly* they were more often present than in these worldly and unspiritual days. But not so, *invisibly*. On the contrary; on the sure Word of Christ, we know for certain that *now*, ever

since, at least, these great words were spoken to Nathaniel, the Heaven has been open, and the angels of God continually ascending and descending upon the sons of God in Christ. The path of God's true servant, whoever he be, is continually and ever surrounded by them: camping round him, driving away evil, and giving him all refreshment and comfort as he needs them. They are not to be worshipped. God forbid. They would indignantly refuse our worship. They and we alike must join in worshipping God only. They are our blessed helpers, our elder brothers—not our masters. Very much do those people lose, not of truth only, but of comfort and help, and high thought, to whom the whole of this Invisible World is as though it were not;—who walk through this work-day world seeing nothing but what their eyes can see, immersed in the tangible interests that surround them, closing, as far as they may, their spiritual sense against the spiritual realities of God's great world.

And very much shall we gain, brethren, if soberly and seriously, and following the safe guidance of the Word of God, we open our minds and thoughts to this mighty world of Beings that we cannot see. If in our bodies we belong to this visible and earthly world, much more in our spirits, which are much more truly *ourselves*, do we belong to that spiritual world. We wrong ourselves

grievously when we forget them, or neglect them, or shudder at them. They like ourselves are God's servants —we are destined to higher things than they. Christ did not take on Him the nature of angels, and we in Him, if we be found in Him at the last, shall judge the evil angels, and have our high place above the good angels. Only while we stay here,—while our life is militant here, while we are guarded and assisted by them,—let us ever ask for grace to be as faithful, as loving, as obedient as they are,—that by us, at least, and those whom we can in any way reach or influence, the will of God may in some degree be done in earth, as it is done in Heaven.

Prayers, especially Daily Prayers

ST. MATTHEW vii.

7. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:*
8. *For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.*

I BEG you to observe, brethren, how very strong our Lord's language is in these verses. You see He puts no limit whatever to what He says; He does not keep back anything.

Ask, that is, pray, and it shall be given to you; seek, that is, go to God for that which you want, and you shall find; knock, that is, be importunate and determined to get in to the Presence and Mercy of God, and it shall be opened unto you.

For—and observe how the reason makes the case still stronger—for it never happens that such things fail. Every one that asketh, prayeth real prayers, asketh with real asking, receiveth; none was ever heard of who failed to receive an answer to his prayers, and every one that

seeketh God in earnest is sure to find Him, and every one, without any exception, who knocketh earnestly and importunately at the gate of God's Presence is certain to be let in.

Let every Christian man take that promise to his heart. You must not doubt about God's hearing you; you must not be afraid lest He will not hear you, or lest you are not good enough to pray, or lest your sins are too many or too great to be forgiven. All that is not only utterly mistaken, but it is worse, it is wicked. It is flying in the face of God who made you, who redeemed you, who desires to sanctify you. It is really disobeying Him, and rebelling against Him, under the pretence of being humble and afraid of presumption.

Let every Christian man, then, I say, take that great promise to his heart—every one that asketh is perfectly certain to receive.

But, then, observe also that the asking must be real asking, the seeking real seeking, and the knocking real, earnest knocking. Do not forget *that,* either; for it is just as true, and not a whit less important than the other.

For Christ says also, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven;" and though, in one of these places, He speaks

of entering into the kingdom of heaven, and in the other of giving an answer to prayers, yet, practically, these two things may be regarded as the same; for the answer that God gives to prayers is the gift of His Holy Spirit ("for if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your own children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give His Holy Spirit unto them that ask Him?"), and the Presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man is his necessary qualification for belonging to the kingdom of heaven now upon the earth, and finally entering into it with Christ when this earth is over.

Put, then, these two things together, brethren, and you have the full doctrine of Christ respecting your prayers. Merely saying Lord, Lord, without meaning what you say, and proving that meaning by doing it, *that* is no praying at all; whether it be done in your own chamber, by your bedside, or in the Church, that, I say, is not *praying*. But whenever you *do pray*, that is to say, whenever you ask God in thorough good earnest, ask Him for pardon, for help, for grace—intending to do, and trying your best to do, the very things you ask help for; then you may be quite certain—as certain as you are that there is a God in the heavens who made the heavens and the earth—that your prayer will not be ineffectual. It must be heard; it will be heard. In some way or other, as God sees is best for you, the

answer will come. You will be the better for it. Perhaps you may not feel it; very possibly you may not. You may perhaps feel disappointed that you feel so little of it. But for all that, hold on, pray on. It is doing you good, bringing you nearer to God, helping your soul, bringing the grace of the Holy Spirit more and more richly upon you. Hold it fast; hold it faster and faster till you die—that every one, every one without a single exception, that really asketh receiveth, and that every one that really seeketh findeth, and that to every one that really knocketh it is undoubtedly opened.

But when and how shall we pray? Let us again look to the words of Christ for our answer. First, privately, by ourselves; quite alone. "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

Now, brethren, in the face of these words, I cannot see how any man or woman can suppose themselves to be obeying Christ, or to be in any way real Christians, unless they say their prayers constantly by themselves. By constantly I mean at least every morning when they get up, and every evening when they go to bed; thanking God for preserving them safely in the time past, asking His forgiveness for any sins which they have committed during it, and praying Him to give them

grace to do His will in the time that is coming—praying *really*, remember; not saying Lord, Lord, only, and neither doing nor meaning to do His will, but praying with real, earnest, fervent prayer, remembering that the effectual, fervent prayer of a man who is in earnest to be righteous availeth much before God. And I say *alone;* because no man whatever, none but God only, can see to the depth of the human heart, or fully understand the needs and the longings, and all the detail of thoughts, as well as acts, which has to be laid before God in prayers. There are many things which we should ask *together*—families together, parishes together, Christian people, even though strangers to one another in other ways, together; but there is much which each one of us must go before God with *alone;* things which we could not express in words if we tried; things which it would be no good to express in words if we could; but things which, as we lay our hearts open before God in our solitary prayers, He will read, and reading, pardon, and sanctify us for His dear Son's sake in whose Name the real prayer is offered.

No person, I think, brethren, can in the face of this Holy Scripture doubt, as I just now said, that every person who is, or hopes that he is a Christian, must constantly say his prayer to God by himself alone.

But this is not all. We must also meet, in order to

pray together; meet in church, and join in common prayers. This, again, is a different thing from our own prayers said in private, and not less necessary. What, again, does our Lord say upon this point?—"I say unto you, if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

See—not only our separate prayers are certain of receiving their answer, but our common or united prayers are so too. When we meet here to pray, Christ Himself is in a very particular way present among us. No doubt, as He is God, He is always present everywhere; but He has promised to be present in a very special and particular way when we meet, and therefore every prayer they agree together to ask—and I must tell you that the word which our Lord actually used is not "*agree*," but which they *speak aloud* together—is quite certain of being answered; always, of course, supposing that the prayers are, as I have explained, real prayers; that is, prayers of men intending themselves to do, and doing as far as they can, the will of God, to whom the prayers are offered.

In accordance with this command and promise of Christ, we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews that we

are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is. So that you see even in the Apostle's days some people stayed away from church and prayers, to their own great loss.

Thus, then, brethren, on the most certain and assured word of our Blessed Lord Himself we rest the absolute duty and the unspeakable blessing of continual prayers; prayers in private, and prayers in public; prayers alone, prayers in family, and prayers in church. As we need the blessing of God very greatly, not only in our separate souls, but also in our families and in our general community, so we need continual prayers in all these three kinds by which these blessings may be gained.

And now, brethren, let me say a few earnest words to you about our Church prayers. I wish we could see more people at church on Sundays. The morning service is apt to be very thinly attended. The afternoon service is fuller; but not nearly as full as the church will hold, nor nearly so full as the population of the parish should make it. I do not speak now so much of those who go to chapel—though I most earnestly desire, and would most thankfully do anything and everything in my power to bring them back to the sober, simple, faithful worship of the Church instead of their own self-chosen and fantastic ways;—but I speak now of those who profess to be Church-people. Why do they not all come

to church? Why are some people, some families, almost always absent? Can they spare the grace and blessing of God? Can they do without prayers? Why are some of you present sometimes, and not always? always, I mean, when health and other such necessary things permit?

It is now turned of a year since I began the practice of daily morning prayers, and the bell rings, as you all know, for prayers at half-past nine in the morning. From six or seven homes in the village we have usually had worshippers at church; and I will venture to say for them that they have found it a great comfort and support to them to meet in joint prayer, and begin the day with sacred worship.

But I am disappointed not to see more. I know well that a very large number cannot possibly come. Their necessary work prevents it; and they would not be doing right, if they neglected their necessary work, even for the purpose of coming to church. I therefore know well that we cannot expect large congregations. But there are old people, who are past work; who find time hang heavily on their hands, who have no such necessary engagements to keep them at home. Why do we not see them here? Would it not be a comfort to them to be reminded of sacred things every day? Would it not be good for them to hear the Lessons read, and to come

to know something more of the Bible than they do? Would it not help them to prepare themselves for the end, which must be coming soon upon them, and may be coming ever so soon? Is it not a good thing and a happy thing to see the old man and the old woman who can do little else, yet find their way to church, and say their prayers day by day? And there are others besides the very old:—people who if not always, yet sometimes, are at leisure for so short a time in the forenoon, and who would do very well and wisely to come and join with us when they can in our good and sober worship. The church is open—the bell rings—the service is short:—do you not think that if people were in great earnest to serve God, they would sometimes find or *make* the half hour's leisure, which would enable them to take their part in our good prayers?

I will tell you one or two plain benefits that they would gain by it. First of all, they would pray,—and that at a time when otherwise they would, I suppose, certainly not be praying.

Then they would hear two chapters of the Bible read. Now observe, brethren, most people know very little of the Bible; very little indeed. But nearly the whole of the Old Testament is read through in the course of the daily Lessons in a year, and the whole of the Old Testament, except the Book of Revelation, is read through

three times. Now, if a person brought his Bible with him to church, and followed with his eye as well as with his ear the clergyman reading the Lessons, would he not come to know a great deal more about the blessed Bible, and all its various contents, than he does now? It seems to me that besides the actual words he heard, he would be interested often to read on, and wish to learn, and make inquiry, and come to be a much better instructed Christian than a great many of us are.

Again, there are the Psalms, the precious Psalms. Is it not wholesome and good to read and say these Psalms; and should we be likely to read and say them if we did not come to church? And I think that a great benefit would come from daily attendance in this respect; that people would not be so shy of taking their own part *aloud* in these parts of the service which belong to them. It is melancholy often to hear the silence of the greater part of the congregation in a full church; in recited psalm, in versicle, in amen, and in the musical hymns. We do not wish that the work of the congregation should devolve upon one. We wish the whole church to speak,—loudly, clearly, in good earnest. Do you remember what I told you early in this sermon, that the real words of the Lord's promise in the original language are not, when two of you shall

agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, —but when two of you shall *speak aloud together* concerning anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in Heaven?

Then again, I think that if people came to church in the forenoon of a week-day, and really prayed, they would find themselves much helped to keep up a Christian mind during the day. You could hardly rise up from prayer,—from *real* prayer, mark you,—and go back straightway to sin, to dishonesty, to evil language, to malice, or to other sorts of wickedness. And I also think that you would feel yourselves bound more closely and nearly in all brotherly kindness to your fellow-worshippers. There is no bond in ordinary life so strong as that which rises from joint worship: when people have knelt side by side to confess their sins, when they have listened together to the voice of God's mercy and pardon, when they have joined their voices in prayer, when they know that their hearts are together in all sacred wishes and intentions, when they feel assured that they shall meet together in heaven because they meet so constantly and happily together upon the earth in God's visible church, which is the type of heaven.

There is a great danger lest, as things are now, we come to forget God from Monday to Saturday,—as

though once a week it were quite enough to remember Him, while all the rest of the time might well be given to all sorts of other thoughts and things, ever so unlike to what He loves and wills. And I need hardly tell you that if a man forgets God from Monday to Saturday, the remembering Him on Sunday is apt to become a very cold and irksome thing, which he escapes when he can, and which is hardly likely to do him much good, even if he continues to observe it.

Finally,—I think that if we had more worshippers at daily prayers, we should soon find that we had more communicants at the Lord's Table. The two things go together in great degree. One who is earnest to pray when he can with his brethren, is sure to be earnest to partake in that Holy Feast which binds him to the Head and to the Body of his Lord; which brings him nearer than anything else in this world to Christ, making him one with Christ, and Christ with him, keeping him in his own blessed place as a stone in the Temple of the Lord, and a member in His Body which is the Church.

Meanwhile, if it please God, the bell will continue to ring, and the daily prayers to be offered, and perhaps, by the grace of God, our little morning congregation may sometimes be enlarged by old people who wish to come near to God, and not forget Him as their time draws

nearer for appearing in His presence, and by younger ones who hope to strengthen themselves for better and holier service in their callings, by devoting their occasional short leisure to worship Him among their brethren.

They all with one consent began to make excuse

ST. LUKE xiv.

15. *And when one of them that sat at meat with Him heard these things, he said unto Him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.*
16. *Then said He unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:*
17. *And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come: for all things are now ready.*
18. *And they all with one consent began to make excuse.*

THIS parable, brethren, is appointed to be read for the Gospel for this day: and I think that considering that it is a Communion Sunday, and considering the small number (small I mean in comparison with the population of the parish) who met this morning at the Lord's Table in pursuance of His gracious invitation to feed on His most sacred spiritual Body and Blood, it would be quite wrong in us to pass by the lesson which the Providence of God has so expressly suggested to our particular consideration to-day.

Observe, then, first the occasion which led to the parable: a guest who was present with Him at the house of one of the chief Pharisees, hearing Him speak of the recompense which is promised at the resurrection of the just, could not refrain from exclaiming, O how blessed must these people be, who shall eat bread in the kingdom of Heaven! What a wonderful recompense will that be for having given bread to the poor and maimed, and lame and blind. What a glorious promise! Who would not do *anything* to gain such a reward! To eat bread,—to sit down at God's own Table, to be admitted to His feast, in His kingdom! Blessed indeed is he that shall, as you say, eat bread in the kingdom of God!

"Then said He unto him, A certain man made a great supper and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come: for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse."

See how calmly, yet how sadly, and with what painful foresight of what would really be the case, the Lord replies to the guest's natural exclamation! You say, blessed will those be who are allowed to eat bread in the kingdom of Heaven: and you truly think so: and you are very right; for they will be greatly blessed. But I can tell you that they will mostly not come.

Most of them will make excuses. They will not say point-blank that they do not choose to come; but they will find all manner of reasons why they should not come; and instead of accepting the invitation with glad and ready hearts, each will beg that the Master of the Feast will hold him excused, and so will all stay away. I suppose that the guest to whom the Lord addressed this answer could hardly believe it. He would probably think it quite impossible that men should be so wilful and so blind as to refuse an offer so blessed,—and think that the Lord was taking a gloomy, perhaps an unkind, view of men's neglectfulness and folly.

But is not this mournful prediction fulfilled, brethren, monthly before our eyes?

Are *we* not, time after time, bidden by our Lord Himself to come to His Table, to eat bread, and drink wine in the kingdom of God? to eat that sacred bread of which He said, Take eat, this is My Body, and to drink that sacred wine of which He said, Drink ye all of this, for this is My Blood, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins? Are we not told that so often as we eat that bread and drink that cup we do show forth and publish the gracious and saving death of Christ till He come? Are we not bidden to do this, so often as we eat and drink these sacred elements, in commemoration or remembrance of Him? Are we not told

that except we eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, that we have no life in us; but that if we eat His Flesh and drink His Blood He dwelleth in us, and we in Him: He is one with us, and we one with Him? Are we not told that the bread we break then is the participation of the Body of Christ, and the cup of blessing which we bless is the participation of the Blood of Christ? Are we not told that being partakers of that one bread we are one Body in Christ?

Does any man doubt the truth of these things? Can I not shew you all of them, and many more besides them, written in the plainest way in your Bibles? Can you not read them there? not in one place only, but in many —not in one Gospel only, but in each Gospel, and in many Epistles? Do you doubt them? No: I venture to say, that you do not doubt them. You believe the words of Christ, and His Apostles, and you know that they are true.

Do you not think that if any of you, being a person capable of serious thoughts, were told all this for the first time, having never heard it before: suppose any one were to say to you, Christ is going to offer you a spiritual feast. He promises that He will give you bread and wine at His Own Table: but that in that bread and wine He will really, and in a divine and spiritual way, be giving you the wonderful Food of your souls, His

own Body and Blood, which will operate to pardon you, and strengthen you, and assure you of His favour, to cleanse you, to give your body and soul everlasting life, to give you assurance that still, even after all your sins which you know of, you need not doubt that you are really members of His most sacred Body the Church.

How, I say, would any person, having any serious thoughts about religion at all, hear such things as these for the first time? Would he not exclaim, O how blessed, how inexpressibly blessed shall we be to be allowed thus to eat bread in the kingdom of Heaven! What happiness will it be, how we will love it, how we will flock to it, how all our friends will flock to it, how it will help us, how thankful it will make us, how it will bind us together, how it will show us that we all are one Bread and one Body, how it will cheer us in our sorrows, and how it will mix with our joys and sanctify them! How it will be to us, while we remain upon the earth, the constant assurance of our being partakers hereafter of that blessed marriage supper of the Lamb which we read of in the Book of the Revelation of St. John!

None can doubt, I suppose, that this is the way in which we should speak of the Lord's Supper, if any person were to tell us, for the first time, the great things which are said of it in Holy Scripture. But now,

brethren, consider what comes of all this? what is the result in fact—in this church, and parish, in most churches and parishes in this land, Christian as it is, and Christian as it considers itself?

Do all flock to Communion? Do all, who are of age to be admitted there, show by their eagerness to come and their regularity in coming that they really feel the blesedness of being allowed to partake of that saving stream, that heavenly food?

Alas! is it not rather true of the great majority that they all with one consent begin to make excuse? Anything seems to serve as an excuse. *They are not good enough,*—but if they desire to be better, is not this the very way to get better? *They do not feel ready to do so great a thing*:—but are they ready to die? Death may come upon them (alas! none know it better than they do) at any moment: are they ready to take the chance, and risk being called away to the presence of God unprepared? And if they do not feel ready to do so great a thing, are they not going to begin to be ready, to get ready? *They do not see that those who come to Communion are the better for it,*—as if they can see into their neighbour's souls, or have the slightest knowledge of the secret working of the Holy Spirit in them. *They do not see that those who come to Communion are any better than they are themselves.* This I look upon as

the most deceitful, I could almost say the most wicked, of all the manifold excuses which men are blind enough to offer for staying away. Utterly unable as they are to form any judgment of other men's souls, what right can they have to pronounce any such sentence upon them? To his own master each stands or falls; and woe it were indeed for any one deliberately to incur his own falling, because he chooses to think another no better than himself.

Then, again, some think that *they are safe without.* They flatter themselves that they are converted; that they have the Spirit of God,—that they have faith;—and look upon these *ordinances*, as they are apt reproachfully to call them, as if they were opposed to spiritual religion, and hindrances rather than helps to those who desire to worship God in spirit and in truth. But what a terrible presumption this is! when Christ Himself instituted the Sacrament of the Communion: with almost His last words bade His disciples do this,—continue to do it,—in remembrance of Him, and said such great and wonderful things about its worth and efficacy. Some again *are afraid*—afraid of the strong things which St. Paul says about receiving unworthily, not knowing that none can be unworthy who is really in earnest, and that the Apostle is not speaking about men who are repenting, even of the worst of sins, but of those who venture to

come to the Lord's Table without any earnestness, and without any repentance, negligently, and carelessly.

But whether it be for this reason or for that, there is one point on which they agree. Alas! with one consent they make excuse. They do not come.

Men and women: respectable in their general life and behaviour, and respected: whole families, parents, growing old, and greatly interested in their children's goodness,—yet month after month, year after year, they do not come, nor their children.

Old people—such as surely must be thinking that they cannot have long to stay here upon the earth,—how many of them there are who never come to Holy Communion. Middle-aged people, who are thoughtful about other things, and know how often sickness comes on suddenly, and in a few days carries the strongest to the grave,—yet how many of these there are who never come to Holy Communion! Young people—taught and confirmed, who have perhaps in some instances come once or twice after their confirmation, how often do they fall off again, and become strangers to the Holy Communion to which they have been admitted!

And so the years pass on; the old die, the young become old: the Lord's Feast is tasted by a few only. To the great majority of the people it is a thing put aside,

neglected, forgotten. They omit it in their life: they die without the comfort of it.

Now why is this? Can any reason be given to account for it? Yes, brethren, I think there can.

Is it that they do not *know* what the Scriptures say concerning Holy Communion? Partly it is. For though they have often heard it, yet they have not paid much attention to it, and greatly forget it. Is it that they do not *believe* what the Scriptures say concerning it? Oh no! not that. They quite believe it. But they manage to put it out of their minds, and not to think about it. Is it that they have determined to do without it, and resolved to stay away all their lives? No, it is not often *so*. Many a one intends *some day*, next year perhaps, when he grows older—when he is not so busy—when his heart is more at liberty—*some day* to turn to God and be found among those who seek the sacred Communion with their Lord at the Altar.

No: none of these is the real reason. It is not that they do not know. It is not that they do not believe. It is not that they have made up their minds on any sort of imaginary ground of reason or religion that they will not come.

What is it then? *It is that they are not altogether in earnest about religion.* They think, and rightly too, that if they go to Holy Communion, they do really undertake,

in the sight of God and man, to be altogether holy, pure, faithful, and religious; and for this they do not feel ready.

They are ready, it may be, to come to church. They are ready, perhaps, to say their prayers. They are ready to be half-religious. But to be quite Christ's servants: to be really devoted to Him: to give Him their whole hearts, to be His in their body, soul, and spirit:—for this they are not ready. Believe me, brethren, this is the very truth. They are half-hearted. They cling *half* to other things. Half of their heart is still with the world, and they have not the bravery, and the faith, and the wisdom to tear it away, and give it to Christ. Oh, that the Spirit of Christ might awaken them to a sense of their exceeding loss in thus depriving themselves of the closest approach to God which is allowed to us while we remain in the flesh, of the best means of growing in grace and goodness, of the most certain assurance of God's favour and love towards us, and of our continued acceptance and position as members of the Body of our Lord!

It is now a good many months since I declared my purpose of affording the opportunity of Communion more frequently than had of late years been the custom in the parish. I have not done so yet,—partly because I felt somewhat disappointed at the small numbers of those

who came to the monthly celebration, and partly because the seasons of Easter and Whitsuntide, of themselves, led to the Communion being somewhat more frequent than usual. But now Whitsuntide is passed, and no more breaks in the regularity of the Christian year will come before Advent. I therefore propose to celebrate the Holy Communion on the third as well as the first Sunday in each month. There is no justice in starving the faith of those who are really in earnest because so many have hitherto refused to partake of the feast; and may be the more continual offer may lead some more to bethink themselves,—whether they are not making—to say the least of it—a very heavy mistake in declining to join in this most sacred and necessary duty.

If there is any aid which I can give in private, most gladly and thankfully will I give it.

On this day fortnight therefore, brethren, I invite you, in the name of God, I call you on Christ's behalf, I exhort you as ye love your own salvation, to join with us, if it please God to spare us, in Holy Communion.

And, oh, be in earnest! Be in earnest, while you are yet spared, to draw near to God in the special way which God has appointed. Do not let the months and years slip by as they have slipped by before, but bravely, faithfully, wisely, repent you of your sins, be in perfect charity with all men, determine to lead a new life, follow-

ing the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in His holy ways,—and in this mind draw near in faith to the Altar of God, and partake of His Holy Communion to the great comfort and strengthening and sanctification of your souls.

Ascension Day

ACTS I.

9. *And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.*
10. *And while they looked stedfastly towards heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;*
11. *Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.*

FORTY days had elapsed, brethren, since the great day of the Resurrection, when the Crucified broke the bands of death, because it was no longer possible that He should be holden thereby, and triumphed over Satan and the grave.

During these forty days He had not been, as before, in constant companionship with the Apostles. He had appeared to them now and then,—at intervals,—to one, to two, to ten, to eleven, to above five hundred brethren at once—He had not come in the ordinary way in which men come and go: but appeared on a sudden, and on a sudden disappeared—was with them when the doors

were shut, was standing unexpectedly upon the sea-shore,—altogether was with them in a more wonderful way than before—His glorified Body known to them, though so greatly changed, bearing the marks of His glorious humiliation, the print of the nails, and the gash of the Roman soldier's spear; all these things had made the forty days which succeeded to the Resurrection day days of great solemnity and wonderful preciousness. During them, too, He had spoken many great and holy words—words which, when they come to be put together and regarded in their completeness, may well be considered to form the very Charter of the Church, the very *things of the Kingdom of God.*

And now these forty wonderful days being completed, He led them out as far as to Bethany, a short two miles to the south of Jerusalem, the village where He had so recently raised Lazarus from the dead, and spent His last earthly Sabbath with him and his sisters. He led them out, and spoke words of much comfort and promise, assuring them of the coming of the Holy Ghost upon them; and as soon as His words were done, He began visibly to rise before their eyes—His sacred Body, as it had not been bound for the last forty days by the ordinary laws which control the bodies of men, now no longer subject to the common law of gravitation. He rose, slowly, we may suppose, and gradually. He was

blessing them with His hands lifted up at the moment that He began to rise from the earth, and we may well believe that it was in the same attitude, and with the same sacred utterances of blessing, that He rose higher and higher, growing smaller to their eyes, and His words becoming less audible, till an intervening cloud hid Him from their sight, and they beheld Him no more.

He was gone: but oh, how different must have been their feelings in parting with Him so from those with which they had parted with Him six weeks before! when they had witnessed the terrible scenes of the betrayal, the trial, the condemnation, the Crucifixion, the death, the burial—when, in consternation and distress of mind, they could only exclaim in wonder and almost despair, "We trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel!"

But now, how totally was all changed! He had risen —He had conquered death—He had been present with them supernaturally all these days—He had breathed upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost—He had bidden them go forth and preach and baptize with a commission not less lofty and Divine than that which He had Himself received from the Father—He had worn among then the glorified flesh which was fitted for immortal life in heaven—and after all this, made familiar to them

and quite accustomed by six holy weeks of occasional intercourse and conversation, He visibly, slowly, amid blessing, and words of comfort and peace, was lifted buoyantly from the earth on the level hill-top of Olivet, where it begins to be Bethany, and passed from their sight into the luminous cloud.

He was gone; and no doubt they stood long gazing up into heaven, slow to feel assured that they had seen the last of Him—very desirous not to miss or pass unobserved any indication or sign of Him that might still be given—very loth to remove their eyes from the spot in the heavens where they had seen Him last. And before they were yet satisfied with gazing, and their eyes were still fixed upon the bright cloud in which He had disappeared, behold two men—angels, no doubt, in the form of men—were standing by them in white apparel, which also said, "Ye men of Galilee, Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven."

He was gone; and from that day to this no human eyes, save those of St. Stephen in his stoning, St. Paul in his conversion, and St. John in the great vision of the Island of Patmos, have seen Him.

He was gone: and from that day to this His faithful Church has been as it were gazing up into Heaven, as

the Apostles gazed up from the hill-top of Bethany, waiting, in no uncertainty, but with no impatience, for the day when, as He went, He will assuredly return again. Working upon the earth, but with her eyes ever fixed upon the Heaven, suffering upon the earth, but in all her sufferings cheered to know that her Lord—and in Him she herself—hath a place assured in Heaven,—in the earth in the body, but in Heaven in the Spirit,—the faithful Church of God from that day to this has had her gaze upon her ascended Lord, and waits.

And the same attitude, and the same state of mind which we attribute to the faithful waiting Church, is surely, brethren, the right attitude and the right frame of mind for each single Christian within the Church. What, think you, does St. Paul mean when he tells the Philippians that our conversation is in Heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. Does he not mean that we, each single one among us, *has in title*, and ought to have in fact, his conversation, that is, his citizenship, his soul's place, his real heart's dwelling, his treasure in Heaven, along with his ascended Lord, because he himself knows that that ascended Lord will return and change *his* vile body too, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious Body?

No doubt our walk is for the present upon the earth; and, alas! the earth exercises a strange and sad power

over us. All sorts of earthly-bred desires, desires of our bodies, and desires of our lower souls, weave chains round us from which it is very difficult to escape. And if we have been so unhappy as to give way to such things in former days, the hold they have upon us is only so much the closer and the harder to shake off. And sloth and laziness creep over us, and soon bring in other things in their train, which grow up like clinging weeds among the good corn, and keep it from rising freely and ripening towards Heaven.

And our work is upon the earth,—the various work, which in our separate callings, God has appointed for us to do. All is on the earth, and we must do it with all our might. But this too operates to keep our thought, and with it our heart, down here on the earth, and detain it from its own free right in Christ to the glorious citizenship of Heaven.

Yes, it is very true: and men and women have, as you well know, endeavoured by withdrawing themselves from contact with the outer world in hermitages, in convents, in monasteries, and the like, to shake off from their souls the chains of the world, and to live in heaven even while in the body they remained upon the earth.

But it is a vain thought. The ideas, the wishes, the passions, the temptations, the dangers of the world follow them even in the austerest solitudes, and find their way

even amid the most ascetic exercises. These things are subtle as the air we breathe, and, I will venture to add, as necessary. They are to be battled with, not fled from: they are to be met and conquered, not regarded as invincible, and shut out by bars and gratings.

It has been a noble thought, and a grand and holy wish, I have no doubt, very often: but it is surely a vain and mistaken one.

> "We must not bid for silent cell
> Our neighbour and our work farewell,
> Nor strive to wind ourselves too high
> For sinful man beneath the sky."

No: our strength is not to be gained so. We must find the heavenly life in the very midst of the toils, the labours, the temptations, and the dangers of the earthly life. The inward battle which no one knows of but ourselves, and the Holy Spirit of God who is with us and ready to help us in it,—that inward battle against secret desires of evil must be fought and won. We cannot run away from it. Of whatever sort it be,—whether of body more or of mind, whether of temper, or of luxury, or of idleness, or of falsehood, or of coveting, or of disobedience,—or of whatever kind it be,—and the thoughtful heart knoweth its own plague and tasteth the sad flavour of its own bitterness,—it must be conquered by resolute persevering warfare in the soul: by

prayers constant, fervent, unremitting; by earnest confessions, by real struggles, by real mortification of desires, by determined and continued purpose. It is very easy to say all this, brethren; and we all readily and fully agree with it when we hear it; but, oh! how hard and difficult it is to do it! God give us grace, each one in secret, to fight that battle, and in His strength to win it! Not to attempt to run away from it, or anyway to shut our eyes to it, or try to shirk it, but to meet it manfully, Christianly,—as those whose Lord is in Heaven, where their citizenship also is,—and in His strength and grace to win it!

Then there is our outward battle too: our work whatever it is in life; to be done for Him as well as ever we can, and in Him: and our *witness*. For each one of us is bound to be in his generation, and in his place on earth, a *witness for Christ* in the midst of a disobedient and gainsaying people. This witness we must bear in many ways: by shewing the good example of holy Christian lives ourselves: and this is a witness which all can read and understand, and which they *do* read and understand. It is a witness which speaks as loudly from the poor man's cottage as from the rich man's house. I am not sure whether it does not actually speak more loudly. For a holy cottage:—good, Christian parents in humble life, a well and Christianly-trained

family; girls modest, industrious, full of prayers and good deeds of kindness and charity; boys religious, self-controlling, hard-working, dutiful at home, pure of speech and life,—I say, a labourer's family like this bears almost a louder witness for Christ and Heaven than even those among whom such things are more expected and looked for.

All this, brethren, is our earthly work. It must be done soon: it must be done here. And it must be done for His sake who ascended from the Hill of Olivet as on this day, and who, ten days afterwards, sent down the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, to give us the strength to do it with.

This is the way by which we are to bring the great doctrine of the Ascension of Christ into our daily and hourly life; claiming and exercising our citizenship of Heaven even while we live in the midst of earthly things.

God, Who watches us within and without, Who sees not only our outward life, but all the secret working of our most private and deeply-hidden thoughts,—is sparing us day by day for no other reason than that we may, if we will, turn to Him more heartily, and yield ourselves up more fully to the guidance and government of His Holy Spirit. How many more days, or months, or it may be years, He may still give us, is as well

known to Him as it is profoundly secret to us. But here is one Ascension-Day more: one more holy and blessed reminding of Him who is gone in the Flesh, though present in the Spirit,—Who will one day come in clouds, as the cloud on that day received Him out of the Apostles' sight,—to judge the quick and the dead.

May He give us grace to lay more to our heart than ever hitherto, His great Ascension lesson: that as we verily believe our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the Heavens, and there to sit on the right hand of the Father, so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell: citizens of Heaven, while we toil, and pray, and, if it be His will, suffer upon earth; our bodies, our work, our warfare down below, but our minds continually drawn up, by His loving grace, to high and heavenly things. Be this the blessed, the holy, the happy lot of every one amongst us, for the sake of the same ascended Lord, Jesus Christ our only Saviour and Redeemer.

The Comforter

St. John xiv.

18. *I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you.*

I TRUST that there are many here present who know their Bibles, and especially the blessed Gospels so well, as to recognise these words at once as forming a part of that very solemn discourse which our Lord held with His Apostles on the last evening of His life on earth, recorded in the fourteenth and three following chapters of St. John. That discourse is far more full and explicit on the subject of the Holy Ghost, and His mission to teach and comfort the Church of God, than any other which the Lord is recorded to have spoken during all His life on earth. So full indeed is it of this great subject, that we might very properly call it the discourse respecting the Holy Ghost.

The Lord, you know, was on the point of leaving them: first, on the very next day, when He should stretch His holy, loving arms upon the Cross, and dying

as a man, leave them to go in the Spirit to the place of departed souls, while His body should be laid in the rich man's grave. Then again, when the victory over the grave was won, and He was risen from the dead, He was to leave them a second time, rising in His glorified Body into the heavens.

That He should leave them at all was of course a sad thought to them. For they had known him so well, had hung upon His gracious words so often, had seen such wonderful signs of His Divine love and power, that to part with Him at all was a very grievous and bitter thing to them.

But in the midst of the very deepest of their sorrow and fear, He gives them comfort. He tells them that His going is actually a good thing for them: that it is actually expedient for them that He should go away; that unless He goes away the Comforter will not come to them; but that if He goes He will send Him to them: all this, and the office of the Comforter in teaching them, He dwells upon in these three great chapters, and winds it up, if I may so express myself, with this sweet word of promise—"I will not leave you comfortless," I will not leave you orphans (as the word really means), "I will come to you." Now, before I go into more particular explanation of the first words of this promise, I would ask, What does the Lord mean by saying that *He*

would come to them? *He* was going to leave them; and certainly He was not coming back to be with them in the same way in which He had been with them before. They would see Him again for a few days after His first leaving them; but after His second leaving them, they should not see Him again with their eyes. What then did He mean by saying that *He* would come to them? We know that the Holy Spirit came: but how are we to understand that Christ should come?

Brethren, the answer to this question is this: when the Holy Spirit comes, Christ comes. When the Holy Spirit is among men, Christ is there. When the Holy Spirit is in the heart of men, Christ is there. When the Holy Spirit moves the worshippers to meet and offer prayers in spirit and truth, Christ is there in the midst of them. Be sure of this. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. But if any man have the Spirit of Christ, Christ is with Him: not indeed in the flesh, as of old when He was with the disciples in Judæa, but very truly, very really, and very near. "Say not in thine heart who shall ascend into heaven to bring Christ down from above, or who shall descend into the deep to bring up Christ again from the dead," for with the presence of the Spirit, Christ too comes, yea, and the Father; and they make their abode

in the heart which the sanctifying Spirit maketh fit for such holy inmates.

This, then, is the meaning of the Lord's own returning. He does not come back in the flesh; but when the Holy Spirit comes, He comes.

Putting aside, therefore, for the present the particular subject of the Lord's own returning, it is well to turn our minds to-day, brethren, to the thought of the *Comforter*, whose Presence He promised in His own stead. For we are at this moment passing through those very days which answer to the days of the Apostles being left alone. The Lord ascended into heaven as on Thursday last, and it will not be till next Sunday, our great Whit-Sunday, the Christian Pentecost, that we shall be celebrating and blessing God for that mission of the Holy Comforter, who was to be the support of the Church, and of every member of the Church, from that day even to the end of the world.

How, then, are we to understand that the Holy Ghost who came down on Whit-Sunday morning to dwell in the Church of God is the *Comforter?* How does He comfort the Church and Christian people in their Lord's absence? The Lord was seen. He walked among the people as a man; He spoke and was heard; He acted in their sight, doing all sorts of works of power and mercy before their eyes. But the Holy Ghost is invisible;

there is no sight which can see Him; no ear can hear His voice; no mighty deeds of wonder are, at least in these later ages, done by His direct and unquestionable power. How, then, can this Invisible Spirit be so truly a *Comforter* to Christian people as to make it actually better for them that the Lord and Saviour should be withdrawn from their sight, and have ascended up in the flesh to heaven?

Observe then, first, brethren, that the whole doctrine of the Holy Ghost, and all the *comfort* which that doctrine gives or can give, rests upon *faith*—not upon sight, for He and all His operations are wholly invisible, but upon faith. Faith must believe that He is; faith must believe that He came down from heaven to dwell among men; faith must believe the work that He doeth in the Church and in the hearts of men.

Men can disbelieve all this; and, alas! they often do so, and still more often act as if they did so; and this of itself proves that it all rests upon faith. For nobody disbelieves what he sees; and if the works of the Holy Ghost were clear to the eyes of men, it would not be *faith* which believed them, but ordinary sense and experience.

The whole doctrine, I say, rests upon faith; but what does this faith rest upon? For faith, to be reasonable, must have good and solid grounds. It is not a shadowy

thing without foundations. What, then, does this faith rest upon?

I will not go into the answer to this question now, brethren, for it would take me too far away from the particular subject on which I proposed to speak to you this morning; but if it please God to spare me to speak to you next Sunday evening, I will try, by His grace, to explain the grounds on which we believe in the invisible working of the Holy Ghost in the Church, and in our own several souls. For the present I return to the other subject—how are we to understand that the Holy Ghost is the *Comforter?*

The best mode, I think, of answering this question is to consider what are the reasons why we want comfort? what are the main things on earth which *discomfort* us? what are the *causes,* at least the commonest and deepest causes, which make us uncomfortable in our souls and unhappy? For surely *the Comforter* is He who is sent to apply the real and true comfort to the actual and real ills and sorrows which our hearts feel.

Now I cannot be wrong in saying that there are three main things which make men unhappy: first, *sin;* their hearts are sore within them. They know that they have sinned; they know that they have sinned very often and very grievously—they do not know *how* often or how grievously—but they have a very painful and a

very just feeling that they are very bad, that they must be far away from God's favour and love, that God must be much displeased with them. Now, I am quite convinced, brethren—and every day that I live I feel more convinced—that this is the real secret of far the most part of the unhappiness which men feel. There is a secret gnawing in their hearts, and it has a most melancholy power to make them worse and worse. It keeps them from God; it keeps them from church; it keeps them from prayers; it makes them cross and unkind in their homes; it makes their tempers sour and unpleasant to all around them. They flatter themselves that it is other people's misconduct, or other people's unkindness, or all sorts of other and outward things that make them unhappy, and so they grow worse and worse, complaining, bitter, further and further from God and goodness. But the real secret of it all is in their own sin, unrepented and unforgiven. That is the bitter, stagnant, poisonous drop in their souls which turns all to evil, like the cold wet soil which will produce nothing but rushes and barren weeds until it be drained of the lurking, stagnant moisture which rots the roots of every sweet and wholesome plant. First, I say, *sin*—sin past, sin committed over and over again, thousands of times, and unrepented; and secondly, *weakness*. This is a great source of discomfort and unhappiness; when a

man wishing, and in a sort of way intending to be better, feels himself very weak and feeble in his will, very liable to go wrong, very apt to be misled by the first temptation that comes. Men feeling this are apt sometimes to give up, as it were, and say they cannot help it. They know it is wrong, they know it makes them unhappy, but they cannot help it. They cannot resist; temptations are too strong, and all the stronger for having been given way to before. So they go on, miserable in their weakness, and growing weaker every day by yielding to it.

So sin on the conscience, and the sense of weakness, are two of the great causes of men's discomfort of soul.

And the third is outward sorrow; as when God sends sickness, or poverty, or disappointment, or loss of friends, or any of the various trials with which it pleases Him to visit us on our path through this world. Alas! we all know what these are. Some of us perhaps have not yet felt them very sorely ourselves, but even they have seen them in the case of others: and some have felt them very deeply indeed, and know how bitter, and sad, and hard to bear they are.

Now, in all these sad distresses which afflict our lives, there is but one source of real, deep, and heart-consoling *comfort*. I do not deny that there are other sorts of so-called comfort,—palliations of grief, various ways which

seem to answer in some degree for a time. Men may try *not to care*. They may fill their minds with other thoughts. They may busy themselves in business, in pleasure, in drink. They may try to convince themselves that it is no use troubling themselves,—that after all it is not so much their own fault,—that no doubt God will be merciful,—that no doubt all will turn out well in the end,—and in ways like these cover up for awhile the deep sore of sin. But it will not do always. It will not do for long. The sin *will* find them out at the last, though they hide it ever so cunningly from other men's eyes, and even from their own. No—there is no real comfort in all that: and false comforters are they who suggest any such topics of comfort to a sinful soul.

But what comfort does the Holy Ghost the Comforter offer to the sinner?

Oh, brethren, He shows you the true and only way of comfort. He says to your soul, Poor sinful man, you are weary and burthened; will you not turn to Christ who died for you? Poor sinful man, will you not, instead of hiding your sin, sorrowfully open it before Him? Poor, sinful, unhappy man or woman, will you not let me teach you to pray? will you not let me pray for you, and from your heart? will you not let me lift the burthen from your soul? So, we may imagine, the Holy Ghost pleading with us in the depth of our hearts.

O blessed Comforter! He knows the true secret, and the true method of comfort. He knows how to draw the sting out of the terrible discomfort of sin. He bids us confess, and repent, and turn to God; and offers us His strength to do it effectually, His is the best comfort, and the only comfort. Unless a poor sinful creature takes up with that comfort, accepts it with all his heart, and pursues it with all his might, there is no real comfort to be had for him, either in this world or the next.

Then as to weakness. When we feel the sadness of our own poor frail weakness,—when we know from experience how easily we fall, and how hard it is to resist, and how often we give way to things which we know are wrong, where is our comfort to be found and our strength, but in the Comforter, but in the Holy Ghost? Always with us, always full of love and help, always ready to hear, hearing the secret wish as well as the loudest words of prayer,—who but He can give us the strong comfort which our poor weak souls need? Who can help us to resist temptation except Him? Who can enable us to stand where we have hitherto so often fallen, except the Holy Ghost, the Comforter? There is none other. To Him we must flee in prayer: and not in prayer only, but in strong and honest effort to do that which we ask for. For He will not do it *for us:* He will not do it *instead* of us. He will strengthen

us to do it for ourselves: but we must work as well as pray, or else our prayers are merely a delusion. We must fight our own battle in the strength which He gives us. He teacheth our hands to war in that spiritual battle, and our fingers to fight, but He does not win the battle for us without our fighting.

And then, lastly, as to sorrow. Oh, brethren, what *should* we do in our times of deep distress and sorrow—sorrow, I mean, such as that which God sometimes sends upon us in the loss of all our earthly stays and supports —if it were not for the Holy Ghost the Comforter?

What is it, think you, that keeps the bereaved parent's heart, the widow's heart from breaking, but the Holy Ghost the Comforter?

What is it that gives to prayers their wonderful efficacy in soothing the agitated spirit and turning despair into the sweet current of resigned tears, but the Holy Ghost the Comforter?

What is it that in the midst of earthly bereavements lifts the poor mourner's soul to think of God and Heaven, and the invisible world, and the meeting again in the other world, except the Holy Ghost the Comforter?

What is it that teaches the Christian soul to become more than conqueror over pain, and distress, and anguish, to triumph in Christ over the worst assaults of evil, and

even when it is weakest then to be strongest, except the Holy Ghost the Comforter?

Blessed be the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, departing from the world in the flesh, did not leave us *orphans*, but sent the Holy Ghost thus to be another, a very deep, and holy, and blessed Comforter to us.

Only, brethren, we must hold fast that comfort: and hold fast by that Comforter.

You know from Holy Scripture that the Spirit may be quenched within us. You know that the Holy Spirit may be grieved so as to depart from us. You know that He will not always strive with rebellious and wilful men.

O may God give us His grace that, never grieving Him nor quenching His blessed fire within us, nor resisting His holy motions, we may each of us taste of His comfort: His comfort in our sin, leading us to true repentance and amendment—His comfort in our weakness, leading us to strength and victory in our secret spiritual battle—His comfort in our sorrow, leading us to that triumphant resignation, which is like the first realization of the holier and happier life prepared in heaven for those who love and follow Christ.

The Tokens of the Spirit

St. John iii.

8. *The wind bloweth where it listeth: and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

ON this great day, brethren, we commemorate the descent of the Holy Ghost to dwell in and with the Church to the end of time.

To-day is the fourth of the four greatest days which Christians keep in commemoration of the four great events on which our hope of salvation in Christ rests: Christmas Day, the day the Lord was born: Good Friday, the day on which He died for us upon the Cross at Calvary: Easter Day, the day on which He conquered death by rising from the grave: and Whit-Sunday, on which, ten days after His Ascension, He sent down His Holy Spirit to be the other Comforter,—the Guide, the Instructor, the Sanctifier of His people to the end of the world.

I do not propose to occupy our time this evening in

speaking of the general doctrine of the Holy Ghost: how He is one Person, Divine, Eternal, Almighty, in the one Substance of the Most High God, nor to speak of His general work in the world: how He spake by the mouth of the holy Prophets in old time; how He came without measure upon the head of the Son of God after His baptism in Jordan: how He was breathed upon the eleven Apostles after the Resurrection: how He came down with the sound of a mighty rushing wind on the first great Whit-Sunday: nor how He reproves the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment: nor how He is the Comforter, the Teacher of prayer, the Guide into all truth to the Church, the Body of Christ.

All these are very great and important subjects, but I cannot dwell upon them now. For I promised to speak this evening upon one special point: a very great one, too, and one on which it is of the utmost consequence that we should have right ideas—I mean, what are the signs and proofs that we, brethren, you and I separately, do partake in the graces which the Holy Ghost giveth, —that in our hearts, our own separate hearts (for this is a matter which belongs to us one by one, and not in families, or parishes, or sets of people), but that in our own separate hearts the Holy Ghost dwelleth.

It is indeed a most important question: for except we have the Spirit of Christ we are none of His; we may

be outwardly ever so near, ever so much in apparent possession of all the privilege and blessing of Christian people, but except we have the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Ghost in our hearts, we are none of His: we do not belong to Him: He will tell us at the last that He never knew us.

Can any question then be conceived more vitally important to each one of us? Let us then, brethren, endeavour, with the help, as we trust, of that same Holy Spirit, to say a few words which may throw some light upon the true way of answering it.

And, first, I would say a word of caution. The work of the Holy Spirit is, as we all know, invisible. It goes on in the deep of our hearts. It is therefore, in itself, impossible to distinguish from the natural working of our own minds. No man can tell, from *his own mere consciousness*, respecting this or that feeling that he feels, or this or that conviction which he is conscious of, whether it is of the Holy Ghost, or whether it is not. None of us can distinguish, by any sure rule, the motions of the Holy Ghost from those of his own natural mind and conscience.

Consequently, men are very liable to deceive themselves about it. Often and often they feel *perfectly certain* that they are moved by the Holy Ghost to do, and to think in this or that way, when in fact there can be

no doubt that they are wofully, and perhaps even fatally mistaken. Sometimes they have committed terrible crimes, and shocking sins in this sort of certainty, and then no Christian can doubt that they have been dreadfully mistaken. Not unfrequently they have changed their minds, and yet have felt just as certain that it is the Holy Ghost who inspires them with the new and altered thoughts, as they were before that He had inspired them with the former ones, which they have abandoned.

It is therefore a matter of the greatest consequence, to have some better and more trustworthy rule to go by in this important matter than the mere certainty of our own feelings.

And God, in His great mercy, has given us a better and more trustworthy rule.

First of all, He has mercifully ordered some outward and visible things, to which He has expressly attached and bound the promise of His inward and invisible gift of the Holy Ghost.

We call these outward and visible things *sacraments*, and I beg you to consider, brethren, how extremely valuable they are to us in this particular respect of which I am now speaking: namely, that they are plain and clear signs which we can see and know and not doubt about.

If I were preaching to the heathen people of India or

New Zealand, and found them willing to listen, and apparently earnest in believing, I might well and reasonably think that the Holy Ghost was secretly working in their hearts, and turning them towards God and Heaven; and I might encourage them to hope so too: but till I had duly baptized them with water in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, I should have no right to be absolutely sure of it for them, or to tell them to be absolutely sure of it for themselves. But when that was done, I should be able to say to them, Now you must be quite certain that you are admitted into God's family, that you are a member of the Body of Christ, that the Holy Ghost is with you in such a way, that if you pray He will bless and help you, if you repent of your continual sins He will pardon and strengthen you, if you do your diligence to make this holy calling and election sure, He will make your holy diligence successful to the end.

Now just think of the blessedness of being thus assured by an outward sign, about which there can be no question or doubt, of this inward blessing, about which there might have been so much doubt. Think of the inexpressible comfort of being able to think and say, I hoped before that the feeling and belief which I was conscious of were the working of the Holy Ghost in me; but now I have got the outward sign, the sacred washing,

with the holy words of Christ's institution, and now I cannot and must not doubt about it. I know quite well this of itself will not save me: but I know that it puts me into the Church of God, and that now it rests with me to make use of the grace of the Holy Ghost, which is freely and fully offered me.

Now, precisely the same thing which I have said about the Hindoo, or the New Zealander, I say of every one of us who has been baptized. I feel it of myself, and I say it equally confidently of each one of you. By that sign, by that outward act, about which there is no doubt or uncertainty, we were put into such a state before God, that His Holy Spirit is with us to suggest and answer our prayers, to help us in being good, to help us in being watchful, and in governing our own secret hearts, to give us spiritual strength, to sanctify us before God, and bring us to salvation at the last, *if we will.*

That was the assured beginning: the beginning only, no doubt; but the assured and certain beginning of our life in the Holy Ghost.

Then came, when we were old enough, our confirmation, when the graces of Baptism, which had been given to us before we could have faith and repentance of our own for ourselves, were confirmed to us upon our own solemn undertaking the vows which others had taken for us before. Again, you see God attaches the inward

grace of the Holy Ghost to an outward ordinance, which men can see and be certain about.

And then comes the second great sacrament of the Gospel, the Lord's Supper; when, as before, the grace of the Holy Ghost, and therewith the closer union with Christ, is opened to us by the outward sign of the Bread and Wine, which we eat and drink at the Lord's Table.

Now, I beg you to reflect, my dear brethren, on the great goodness and providence of our merciful God, who has thus bound these great gifts to outward things, which we can certainly see and know, and about which we cannot be mistaken. If it were not for these things, which hold our spiritual life together, and form, as it were, so many anchors, which keep us from drifting away into all sorts of fancies and follies of mere imagination, no one can say what groundless confidence on the one hand, or what groundless despair on the other, we might probably be liable to. These things, as I say, hold our spiritual life together, and keep us, so to speak, on the right ground; but I do not say that they are our spiritual life, or that they necessarily make it.

Important, indispensable as these things are, they are not all. One who is baptized may be a sinner, without God in the world throughout his life,—one who is confirmed may forget his vows, and live as if he had never made them,—one who is a communicant at the Lord's

Table, may be a hypocrite, or may fall away at the last: and, alas! there is no doubt that in such cases these outward things only add to their condemnation; for instead of helping their goodness, they only witness to their perverse and impenitent sin.

But God has mercifully given us still further tokens of the presence of His Holy Spirit in our hearts; in the hearts, I mean, of those who have already those outward holds upon the Holy Spirit of which I have spoken.

When they feel in themselves the strong yearning of prayer,—when their hearts long for the grace of God, the pardoning and strengthening grace of God,—and when, being His children, they cry, as children, Abba, Father, to Him who has become their Father in Christ,—then, I venture to say confidently, by the warrant of St. Paul's words written in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that the Holy Spirit beareth witness with their spirit that they are the children of God. That honest, heartfelt, earnest, longing of prayer in the baptized, is, I confidently say, the assured work of the Holy Spirit within them.

Provided,—and this is the last and testing sign of the work of the Spirit within the heart of man,—provided, I say, that that work of the Spirit shew itself, in a way not to be mistaken, in the outer life, in what St. Paul to the Galatians calls the fruits of the Spirit. Now the

fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we are alive in the Spirit we must also walk in the Spirit.

This is, as I said, the last and testing sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and one that can never be dispensed with. Love to God and man, joy in Christ, peace at heart and peace with men, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness,—qualities which all can judge of, and about which there can be no doubt as to whether we have them or no,—faith, earnest, firm, and true, making us faithful and devoted to God in the state of life to which He has been pleased to call us,—meekness, in act and word,—temperance, keeping us from all sorts of excess,—a general self-government and control, which (to use the apostle's strong language) leads us to crucify the affections and lusts of the flesh: this is that "walking in the Spirit" which is to be the last and testing proof that we are in the Spirit.

And now, brethren, I have answered, to the best of my power, and according to the teaching of Holy Scripture and the Church, the question which I proposed at the beginning,—namely, by what signs or tokens you are to know whether you are in the Spirit of God or no.

First, Are you baptized? Well: so far: that puts you within the discipline of the Holy Spirit. Ever since that time He has been pledged to help you if you would be helped.

Are you confirmed? Well, again, so far: for therein the promise of the Holy Spirit has been confirmed to you, and you are still further assured of His help, if you really desire and endeavour to have it.

Are you a communicant at the Lord's Table? Very well again, so far: for if you are in earnest, preparing yourself beforehand, and partaking with serious, earnest, and devout prayers, we cannot doubt that you draw very near to Christ, and that His Holy Spirit is richly given to you,—pardoning you for the past, and strengthening and sanctifying you for what is to come.

Do you feel the eager, earnest, longing desire to pray, constantly opening your heart in confessions, constantly beseeching the help of God to bring you nearer and nearer to Him, dwelling on the thought of His goodness, and wishing nothing so much as to be enabled to please Him better, and to be more like Christ? My Christian brethren, if you truly feel so, I cannot doubt that the Holy Spirit is with you, that your outward privileges have been blessed to you with an abundance of inward grace,—that it is His Inspiration, yes, and His voice

that breathes from your soul in your fervent and earnest supplications.

But men are apt to deceive themselves; and God has given us yet one further test. Lest we should misread our feelings, or be anyway misled by our feelings, or tempted to stop short with our feelings, and go no further than feel and pray,—He bids us, lastly, look to the *fruits*,—the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. There can be no mistake there! Are we living the lives of Christian men and Christian women? Day by day, and night by night,—in our words, in our actions, are we living as God would have us? doing His will, publicly and secretly? Does our conscience tell us that we are doing so? Do those who know us best believe that we are doing so? Does the angel who is with us in our solitude; does the Holy Spirit or the Most High God who sees into the depth of our hearts, know that we are doing so?

Oh, my dear brethren, let us not be too easily satisfied! And, oh! how very easily we are wont to be satisfied! How very easily we come to assure ourselves that all is right with us,—that the Holy Spirit is with us, and the love of Christ, and the favour of the Father! But is it so? Try yourselves even by these signs which I have given. Do you still feel sure? Alas! I would rather hear you say that you *fear*, than that you feel sure. I

would rather hear you confess to many sins, and much unworthiness, than presume upon the certain favour of God, and the undoubted working of the Holy Ghost in your heart. Pray do not mistake. All the signs which I have mentioned are good and true; but the last is the testing one; not indeed *alone;* but as the last of the others. Believe me, if your life does not shew the fruits of the Spirit, you are deceiving yourself in your confidence. You may still turn, no doubt, and repent. You may still, thank God, confess and ask pardon. You may still, thank God, for Christ's sake win that pardon, and the grace to amend. But do not presume.

Still, I say,—but for how long? When will the door be shut,—when will it be too late to cry for mercy?

A week or two since, and a very sudden call of death carried away from our near neighbourhood one who seemed, so far as man could judge, to be prepared by a long life of faith and piety even for a sudden summons.

This week,—O brethren, Christian brethren, shall we not take to heart the still more awful warning, which, more near at hand, more suddenly, and under sadder and more anxious circumstances, God has been pleased to send us this week? and while we can,—while we

are still spared,—turn to God, ever loving, ever merciful, and by humble prayer, repentance, and holy living, cherish the true life of the Holy Spirit in our several hearts ?

Elijah's Warning, Fathers and Children

MALACHI iv.

5. *Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.*

IF you look carefully at the services appointed for the four Sundays in Advent, you will see that they are arranged for the purpose of bringing the subject of our Lord's return before us in an orderly way. The Collect for the first Sunday, to be read throughout the whole Advent season, bids us wake up, throw away the works of darkness and put upon us the armour of light, now that the yearly time of the Lord's birth is drawing so near.

The second Sunday in Advent bids us remember that the Holy Scriptures are a perpetual warning of Christ's return, written and preserved to us, in order that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope—having in our Bibles, brethren, a constant remembrancer that He who is gone from us for a while in the flesh will shortly come again to judge us.

The third Sunday, that is to-day, bids us remember that the clergy are in like manner appointed to keep alive the memory among men of the return of Christ: that as the Lord did send John the Baptist to prepare His way before Him when He first came, so the clergy, the ministers and stewards of His mysteries, may also prepare and make ready His way against the day when He comes the second time.

The fourth Sunday speaks in the immediate anticipation of His coming: only a day or two before the actual Christmas Day, the day of His birth,—O Lord, raise up Thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us;—and bids us remember that the Lord is at hand, actually close at hand, in the commemoration of His holy birth at Bethlehem.

The particular subject then that belongs to to-day, is this, that as Elijah the prophet, in the person of John the Baptist, was sent before the face of the Lord to prepare His way when He first came, so the clergy are to be regarded as sent to prepare His way before His second coming. They now have a mission like that of St. John the Baptist, and like that of Elijah: and as the Jewish people were warned by the Baptist, and flocked out to the river Jordan, and, confessing their sins, were washed by him in the stream, so are the Christian people to take warning at the voice of the clergy, and to turn to re-

pentance before the dreadful day of the second Advent comes, and the day of trial and repentance be passed away.

To-day then is the day on which we are bidden to think of the clergy, as holding the place of Elijah and John the Baptist in old days, and giving us constant warning of the second Advent of the Lord.

And I beg you to observe the particular words in which the prophecy of Elijah's coming and his warning is conveyed: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

I beg you to observe particularly these words. Elijah was to come before the coming of Christ to prepare His way: and the special way of preparing His way was to be that he should turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; and this should be necessary, lest if it were not so the Lord should smite the earth with a curse.

Now observe these words. The Lord was to come. But the people were not ready for His coming. There was, on the contrary, great danger lest His coming should prove a curse to them rather than a blessing. A messenger was therefore to be sent first, in order to save

them, if they would be saved, from so terrible an evil. And what was he to say and do for this purpose? He was to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers. See then what the evil was among the people, that threatened to turn the coming of the Lord into a curse instead of a blessing. It was that the hearts of the fathers were not turned as they should have been towards their children, nor the hearts of the children turned as they should have been towards their fathers,—that is to say, the great evil of the nation, which was at the root of all other evils, was that parents did not keep their children in proper order; did not teach them, love them, keep them in loving discipline and subjection, did not train them up with adequate care and earnest loving authority in the way in which they should go, and consequently the children grew up without that loving obedience, that holy subjection to their parents' authority and instruction, which is at the foundation of all goodness and holiness of character whatever.

There was great and serious danger lest the coming of the Lord upon the earth should prove a curse to the Jews rather than a blessing, because they did not keep the fifth commandment rightly. Parents did not take proper care of their children, and children consequently were not properly obedient to their parents, and so every-

thing went wrong, and the Jewish nation were in the way to lose all benefit in the coming of the Messiah.

Now, observe that the clergy at the present day occupy the same position before the second coming of Christ that Elijah did before the first. As he prepared the way for the first coming by turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and those of the children to their fathers, and so bringing the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, so we, the clergy, have to do what we may to prepare the way for the second coming of Christ, and in great measure by the very same method. And I venture to say, brethren, that never in the Jewish Church was the great lesson of turning the hearts of the fathers and the children to one another more deeply and anxiously needed than it is at this moment among us. It is, I verily believe, the great secret of the moral reform which not this nation only, but the modern nations which are called Christian, most want, and without which all other reforms stop short of probing the great moral sore which afflicts us all to the bottom.

It is needed equally on both sides: first on that of the parents.

Consider, brethren, knowing as you do the interior life of many a home and cottage,—consider how far we can be thought to be discharging before God the loving duty which we who are parents owe to our children.

I will not do more than *allude* to the case where the children are illegitimate, or legitimated in the eye of the law by a tardy marriage. Any one can see how the sin aggravates the difficulty in such a case,—how very gravely the fear of a child turning out amiss must be increased; when his very birth and being testify to passion unrestrained, the law of God broken, and the very fountains of moral purity and holiness defiled. But put this case—I would it were an uncommon one—aside. Suppose that the little one is duly born, and grows, and with its growth begins to be troublesome sometimes. Oh, for the loving, tender, wise hand that will rule gently and lovingly,—no word nor blow of hasty passion,—no foolish indulgence or mischievous tenderness;—but a gentle, steady, loving government, making "home," and "mother," and "father" the sweetest words and the sweetest thoughts of a happy childhood.

But again: the child becomes a big boy, a girl. What of the home-habits? Children are quick to hear and quick to see. What is it that they hear and see? Are the home-habits those of perfect sobriety, modesty, honesty? Are the home-tempers those of mutual kindness, forbearance, and amiableness? Is the home-language that of reverence, purity, truth? Do you not think that your children mark and know and imitate all this, and catch it themselves imperceptibly? so that

the children of a well-ordered Christian household grow up for the most part well-ordered and Christian, while those who are so unhappy as to be born in families of another kind, grow up wild, and dissolute, and often a perpetual distress and trouble to those who have discharged so badly their duties towards them?

Then, again, is the child taught to pray? Does the family pray together? Is he taught the faith of Christ? Is he taken to church? Do the parents go to church? Does he see and know that they prize the wonderful privilege of Holy Communion?

You may *talk* as you will; but your children will observe and know all these things, and if you do not do them, their shortcomings will be, to a great extent at least, your fault and your guilt.

Your child probably goes to school. Well. How far then do the home mornings and the home evenings, the days of holiday and the like, keep up and help the school instruction, or how far do they tend to check and neutralize it?

And then comes what probably is the most anxious time of all, the time when school restraints and occupation are past, and the young man or young woman is not yet fixed in any regular and lasting position of life. That is the time when parents begin to taste the fruits of the earlier training which they have given their

children; whether they are obedient and dutiful, or wild, idle and independent. Then you see the difference. While some are affectionate, industrious, and helpful, some love idle company, are loose in talk and conduct, fall without restraint into various sorts of evil.

I need not pursue it further. Thus do the hearts of the fathers and mothers need to be turned to their children, lest God should in His wrath smite this our earth with a curse.

And in like manner must we warn the children that their hearts do turn in filial love and honour to their own parents. When the parents are good and holy Christian people there is comparatively little difficulty in paying them the life-long tribute of loving duty. But it is their due even when they are otherwise. When they are cross and hard to please, when they are unreasonable and unkind, when they are unhappy, and it may be unhappy from their own sin, still the Christian son or Christian daughter must render the same willing and loving service. Who will care for them if their own child deserts them? What amount of unkindness or degradation can wear out the bond that is between a child and the parent that gave him birth and being?

There is nothing in human life more beautiful than the

constant affection and hearty love of a Christian child to an unworthy parent;—refusing to believe unworthiness wherever it is possible to disbelieve it, and where it is impossible not to know it, still loving on and serving on for Christ's sake, and winning, if it may be, by such sweet service, a parent's soul to repentance and salvation.

And, brethren, when we read that the clergy now occupy the place of Elijah in preparing the way for the return of the Lord upon the earth, we cannot doubt that this must be one chief way in which they must discharge their mission. They must warn the people that the hearts of the fathers must turn more wholly and more religiously to their children in all loving, holy discipline and care, and the hearts of the children more thoroughly in duty and obedience to their fathers, lest when the great and dreadful day of the Lord come, the earth should be smitten with a curse.

It is the very *root* of the matter. Would you love God your Father whom you have *not* seen? How stands it with your love to your own father and mother upon the earth whom you have seen? Remember what St. John says in the like case. He does not scruple to call all such love a falsehood and lie, which does not begin and base itself upon the love of those who hold these

relations to us on the earth, the brothers, the fathers, the masters whom we can see.

And where shall we see such love better or more fully shewn than in our Holy Lord Himself? Think who He was: the very Son of God Himself: eternal, almighty, whom no sin nor evil could possibly touch. And yet He lived all the years of His boyhood, of His youth, yes, and of His early manhood, in filial and loving subjection to His mortal mother, and to him who was called His father. There is the true model for sons and daughters, and I think if young men and women would oftener think of that model, they would be in many ways a good deal different from what they are, and would be happier and better, and please God better, and be more in the way to meet the second coming of Christ as He would have them meet it.

When that dreadful day will be—when the Lord will appear again in judgment, and the course of this world be over—none can tell.

Foolish people have sometimes ventured to predict it. An hundred times nearly it has been prophesied by bold men that in such and such a year it would surely be: but the year has come and passed, and the end is not yet.

And these predictions and prophecies have done in the end nothing but harm. At the moment many have

been frightened, and have turned to all sorts of imaginary helps, and taken up with any sort of teaching or fancy which seemed to promise comfort. 'They have been like men suddenly thrown into the sea, and amid the waves catching at any straw which floated by. But when the panic terror has passed where are they? Alas! the fright soon goes off when the prophecy turns out to be a fable, and the quiet orderly usages of religion are apt to be forgotten as well, and the cause of true faith and true holiness—for never forget, brethren, that true faith and true holiness can never be separated from each other—to have *lost ground* on the whole,—to have lost ground, unmistakeably and lamentably, by the fable and the fright.

No: sober-minded men must not be led by fables. The sacred scriptural truth is before us. By this we stand. To this we cling.

The Lord will surely return. When, we do not know. To us, His return will practically be when we die. For this, whenever it comes, we must by God's grace prepare. We must put our whole trust and confidence in Christ, our most merciful Redeemer and Saviour. We must repent of our sins. We must pray for grace and help to serve Him better. And, as one very special way of serving Him better, we must take to heart the warning of the Prophet Elijah,—the parents

turning their hearts in true affection and holy discipline to their children, and the children turning their hearts in real filial duty and love to their parents, lest the Lord at the last should smite our land or our families with a curse.

Thou shalt see them no more for ever

EXODUS xiv.

13. *The Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them no more again for ever.*

THESE words were spoken by Moses at a moment of terrible danger and fear.

The Children of Israel were at last set free from Egypt. Plague after plague had been sent upon Pharaoh and his people before they would let them go. But at last the terrible night when the angel of God smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat upon his throne to the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of cattle—that awful night, and the great cry that rose up from every home in the land, prevailed; and the people of God were thrust forth in haste. A mighty company, six hundred thousand on foot that were men, besides children, they set forth that night, with all their flocks and herds, from Rameses to Succoth.

On they went, from Succoth to Etham, from Etham, by God's command, they turned and marched straight for the sea. There they encamped before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baal-zephon.

And now came a change. There lay the enormous multitude, hemmed in between their enemies and the sea—no prospect of escape or safety. If the Egyptians should pursue what would become of them? How could they defend such a vast, unarmed crowd, laden with their own goods and the spoils of Egypt; burthened with women and children, and enormous flocks and herds?

Did I say, *if* the Egyptians should pursue? Nay, the Israelites lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians were marching after them. They saw the glitter of the six hundred chariots, even all the chariots of Egypt, with their captains, the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen and his army, and as the evening came on they felt that nothing but the darkness of the night could give them even a short respite from the fate that seemed to be impending over them.

The night was a wonderful one. While the Egyptian army was covered with a thick cloud, darkness so dense and black that they could not see nor stir in it, the face of the cloud that looked towards the Israelites was bright and shining as the day. Perhaps even the bright-

ness may have added to their fear; for they may not have known that while it was so light and clear to them, it lay so thick and dark upon their enemies, and may have feared that they might take advantage of the light to make a sudden attack by night.

And then—so quickly rises up discontent and murmuring with the first aspect of danger—the people of Israel cried in bitter remonstrance against the Lord and against Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness."

So quickly do men turn round, and murmur when things begin to appear to go on amiss, and so do they continually represent, Is not this the word we did tell thee? Did we not tell you so? till discontent rising up within aggravates the danger an hundred-fold, and makes the leader's difficulties well-nigh insupportable.

And Moses said unto the people, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will shew to you to-day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever."

You know, brethren, what followed. In the wonderful brightness of that night the Children of Israel "went forward" in the midst of the sea upon the dry ground, and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left.

I suppose, the advance of the Israelites becoming known in some way to the Egyptians caused Pharaoh to venture through the darkness to pursue them. For it was already the morning watch, that is, roughly speaking, between three and six in the morning, "and the Egyptians were already in the midst of the sea, when the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, and took off their chariot-wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians began to say, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning (the full light of morning, I suppose) appeared, and the Egyptians fled against it; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea."

It is not my purpose, brethren, to dwell this evening any further upon this wonderful deliverance of God's people from their enemies. Though I beg you to remember that all these ancient things are of the

greatest possible importance to us. It was by these acts that God, in the long course of ages, brought about the salvation in which we rejoice. The passage of the Red Sea, the wilderness, the possession of the Holy Land—all these great things, led up to Christ, and so led up to our blessed hopes of everlasting life in Christ. I do not say that these hopes would have been defeated if the Egyptians had overpowered and slain our spiritual fathers of Israel on the shore of the Red Sea, for God might, no doubt, have effected His gracious purpose to us by some other means, but I do say that the escape of the Israelites did, in the Providence of God, lead straight on, as He mercifully designed, to the events in which we place all our Christian cheerfulness in life, and all our Christian hope in death. Besides, that all these events were so ordered as to be types to us of our own separate Christian lives. For, like the Israelites, we escape from the worse than Egyptian bondage of the devil; we pass through the water of baptism as they through the Red Sea; we go through the pilgrimage of life after baptism as they through the forty years' wandering in the wilderness; and we look forward to our promised land in heaven as they to the land flowing with milk and honey, the rest of the land of Canaan.

But, as I said, it was not in order to dwell upon these things that I chose this verse for the subject of our

thought this evening. I rather wished to suggest to you what seems to me to be a striking and useful thought—the way in which, in our common life, we are continually seeing the last of people, continually parting with people without having the least idea or suspicion that we are parting from them till the judgment-day. Consider, brethren, it may not be a thing so strikingly common in a small and retired village as it is in great cities where multitudes of people are assembled, but consider, even in your own experience, how often it happens that you see a person, speak with him, have no suspicion but that you may see him again to-morrow or in a few days, and something happens, he goes away, or you go away, or sickness comes, or death, or accidental circumstances cause you not to meet, and, unawares, that last parting, that unsuspicious, unsuspected parting turns out to have been a parting for life, all unawares, a parting till the judgment-day!

When we part with people, knowing, or fully believing, or suspecting that we are parting for life, as with those who are on their death-bed, or those who are going to distant countries without the intention of ever returning home, there is a certain solemnity, a certain natural thrill of feeling, proportionate, no doubt, to the intimacy and the love we have for them, which makes the parting sad and touching. But, for one such parting

which we know of and feel, there are a thousand which are taking place every day unawares. Do we not feel as if it would be a blessing to us if some one could say to us, Him whom you have just seen, have just left, have just been speaking to, you will never see again till you meet him before the judgment-seat of Christ, when all mankind shall stand before Him to receive the deeds done in the body. That man with whom you have just had high words, with whom you feel so angry, to whom (if you were cool enough to think fairly) you would know you have acted unkindly, if not unjustly, you have parted with him for ever, you will never see him again till you have both risen from your graves to meet your Lord in judgment.

I do not know what you may think of it, brethren, but to me it seems a striking thought, and one as likely to be useful as it is unquestionably just and true, to think how we are thus, well nigh every day, seeing some one or other of God's people, our brethren, for the very last time, parting unawares—parting, to meet no more till the day of judgment.

But it was not only to suggest this thought to your minds that I have thus referred to it, but to show you how it connects itself with some very important words spoken by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, when He is interpreting the Sixth Commandment. You will

remember that after He told His disciples that not only the person who actually killed another, but he that is angry without a cause, and uses hard words to his brother, is guilty of breaking that commandment, He went on to say, "When therefore thou bringest thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave thou thy gift upon the altar, and go thy way. First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

Now this means that, when we come to Holy Communion (alas! our Lord speaks as if we should all come of course to the Holy Communion), and there put our little gift, whatever it is, into the plate, we should bethink ourselves whether we are or are not at Christian peace with all our brethren, that is, with all Christian people with whom we have had any concern or dealing; and if we remember any quarrel unsettled, any wrong unforgiven, any hard word or act unatoned for, that we should not think of putting our gift into God's plate, or imagining that He will accept either us or our offering while such a thing remains. No; rather leave thy gift, go thy way, make thy peace, forgive, be forgiven, set all right and square, see that at least as far as in thee lies thou art in perfect charity with all men—do this first, and then come and offer thy gift.

See, brethren, how our dear Lord, looking forward to

all the troubles, and disputes, and unkindnesses of life, knowing our weaknesses, our tempers, and our occasional provocations, has given us an express time at which all such things are to be settled, namely, the next returning Communion-day, and appointed a significant token of their being settled, namely, the little gift which we put into the Communion-plate. Let us learn to look upon it so; let us learn, when we give freely and cheerfully according as we are disposed in our heart, to think—not only is this little gift intended to help God's poor people, and to be an offering of thanksgiving for the mercy with which He has given food and raiment to me and mine; but besides this, it is a token of Christian peace. I am at Christian peace with all men. If I have had a quarrel, or ill feeling, or hard words, if I have wronged or injured any, the whole has been forgiven. I did not venture to come on Sunday morning to offer this to God without having ascertained, at least on Saturday night, that I had set myself right, by forgiving and being forgiven, with any brother who had aught against me.

And then, brethren, the Lord continues: "Agree with thine adversary quickly whiles thou art in the way with him." And this is the warning which connects these verses more immediately with the subject upon which I have been speaking. Agree with thine adversary quickly; thou hast no time to lose. Agree with thy brother, to

whom thou hast unhappily become an adversary, quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him. For the present he is to be found; he is near thee. At this moment he is so much within thy reach that thou canst, if thou wilt, go to him, and do at least thy part towards establishing true Christian peace between thyself and him. For the present, I say, thou art in the way with him; but who shall insure that thou shalt be in the way with him to-morrow? Amid all the partings unawares of which I have spoken, who shall insure thee that thou shalt ever see his face again? What numberless accidental circumstances, occurring to him and to thee, may so suddenly and so far separate you and him, that you may all unawares have parted with him for ever on this earth. And if it should be so, what is the consequence? You have let slip the opportunity. You might have made peace, and blotted out from your own conscience and from the record of God, all trace of that unhappy wrong. Now, what becomes of it? Listen—"Lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison." The case, unsettled between the brothers, unsettled between the adversaries, is gone by appeal to God. He has appealed to Cæsar. It must go before the throne of God.

Let no man suppose that if he has done his brother a

wrong, and that wrong be not set right by restitution and forgiveness, the death of his brother puts an end to the wrong, or causes it to be forgotten in the sight of God. Oh no; the case is made far worse, not better, by the very thing which you perhaps hoped had put an end to it. No doubt it may still, by earnest repentance, and all such restitution and reparation as is still possible, be forgiven you; but it is a fearful danger to let the moment slip when your brother was still in the way with you, and when the interchange of Christian forgiveness might have done away with wrong, and the Communion gift might have testified before God that you were at Christian peace and in Christian charity with all your brethren.

Forty-five of us, brethren, sisters, neighbours, met together this morning at God's Table, and all, no doubt, offered their Communion gift. I trust we may conclude that each gift so given testified that the giver of it was really in such Christian peace and charity.

Now Lent is upon us, and in six weeks we shall be invited to our great Easter Communion. How many shall we meet then? Will not some of you, who do feel in your hearts the wish to be Christ's faithful servants, but hitherto have, for some cause or other, kept away from the Holy Communion—will you not come *then?* Shall we not be gladdened by seeing some of

those who now leave the Church on Communion mornings, stay behind to obey the Lord's parting command, to strengthen and refresh your souls with the food of spiritual life? By that time, also, a certain number of young people will be newly confirmed—not so many as I had hoped, not so many as there ought to be, but still a certain number.

Ought we not to meet a very much larger company on Easter morning?

Think of it, brethren; and as you think of it, do not forget the blessed significance of the little Communion gift, the token of Christian charity, of Christian forgiveness, and of Christian peace.

Baskets full of Fragments

ST. MARK viii.

19. *When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto Him, Twelve.*
20. *And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven.*
21. *And He said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?*

THESE verses, and the corresponding verses in the sixteenth chapter of St. Matthew, have always appeared to me, brethren, to be deserving of more close and particular observation than I think they commonly receive.

The Lord not only did this remarkable work of power on two separate occasions, multiplying (as indeed He multiplies to us every harvest) the small portion of food to the satisfying of a great multitude—that repetition would of itself be sufficient to indicate a special importance in this miracle: but He also takes particular pains, if I may so speak, that the details of the miracle should be exactly known, and practically remembered.

The quantity of food is very precisely told: five loaves,—do not think, brethren, of a quartern loaf, such as we know, but of what we should rather call rolls,—five loaves, I say, and two fishes on the first occasion; and here again I would remind you that the fishes were freshwater fishes of the inland lake of Gennesaret, which seldom exceed a pound, or at the most two pounds in weight; and on the second occasion, seven loaves and a few little fishes, little even of that sort. Observe, the Lord will have the quantity of the food very precisely counted and remembered.

Then again, as to the number of the people fed. He made a point that there should be no mistake. He made them sit down on the green grass, not in a crowd, but in order, fifty lines of an hundred men in each, so that when they were all seated any person could almost at a glance count them, and tell that there were five thousand; and in like manner the four thousand.

Again, as to the manner in which the wonder was wrought. He took the rolls into His hands, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to His disciples, and through their hands the food was ministered to the people. This on each occasion; so that neither they knew, nor do we know, at what precise point the wonderful multiplication of the food took place; all we

know is that He continued to bless, and to teach, and the apostles to deliver, and there was enough, abundantly enough for all.

And then, lastly, that nothing should be lost He bade the apostles gather up the fragments, to be, no doubt, their own food,—for it might be long before they should be near to inhabited places from which they could get their ordinary supply,—and here, too, He bade them mark exactly how much they gathered up, and count the baskets full, and never forget the exact number.

Now, every point of this narrative, brethren, is full of matter. It is not only that two great miracles were wrought, showing the Lord's divine power, and testifying to His divine mission, but in the repetition of the same miracle, in the smallness, and the particular quantity and nature of the food; in the exactly recorded numbers of the people fed; in the pains taken that there should be no mistake about the numbers; in the demeanour and gestures of the Lord; in the fact that He made His great and divine goodness reach the multitude through the agency of the apostles; in the carefulness lest there should be any waste; in the largeness of the supply of the fragments gathered after the feast was done; and in the precision with which the number of the baskets, as well as the number of the people, was

to be remembered and not forgotten;—in every one, I say, of these particulars, there is great matter for Christian reflection, and a great store of holy Christian lessons. Indeed, it is but one instance of the wonderful richness of Holy Scripture. The deeper you dig, and the more carefully you study, the more you learn. The whole soil is full of gold, to such as carefully, modestly, with prayer, and with the use of the best helps they can obtain, endeavour to search into it.

The particular part of the narrative to which I desire to call your attention this afternoon, is the conclusion of it, as contained in the three verses of the text. The vast multitude, so duly counted, were filled with the food that the Lord had blessed; and the apostles, who had been the Lord's ministers in delivering it to the people, received themselves back in fragments a great store, twelve baskets full,—more by far than ever they had given: for how should five rolls and two small fishes, even if none had been eaten, in the meantime have sufficed to fill twelve baskets, one for each of the apostles, quite full?

Now all this, brethren, was done for our sakes, and it was written for our instruction, and, by the grace of God, we must learn to lose none of it. I apprehend that we have in this act of our Lord a *parable*, if I may so term it, of that which He is continually doing, even

now among us. He is blessing for ever the food of good and holy teaching, the food of good and holy example, the food of good and holy Communion,—and giving it to us, His authorized and commissioned ministers, to deliver to His people,—His six hundred people in our parish, His thousand, or three thousand (or however many it be), in another parish,—and if they be duly faithful in delivering it, not only will the people be fed, fed in their souls, fed to everlasting life, but the faithful ministers will receive back from their flocks precious fragments, fragments of truth, fragments of good example, holy lessons,—ten times more than they give,—to store for their own spiritual food and growth.

I beg you to observe this: the clergyman teaches in his pulpit, or in his school: do you not think that as he teaches, as he tries to make clear to the understanding of the dull,-or the conscience of the easy and self-complacent, some of the multitude of the lessons which he is commissioned to teach, these lessons come home often very vividly to his own conscience and mind? Do you suppose that in so doing he *imparts* only without *receiving?* Is it all on one side? Does he only give? Oh, no; believe me: if his ears are as open to hear, and his conscience as tender to feel, as he would fain have theirs to be, the bell that he rings sounds as loudly in his own ears as it does in theirs, and their

dulness or keenness, their readiness or unreadiness to hear, wakens up a very similar consciousness in his own heart.

Or, consider the clergyman visiting his sick. As he passes from house to house, saying the sacred words of comfort and faith which His Lord has put into his mouth to utter to His people, do you not think that he comes away abundantly enriched by the lessons of faith, of patience, of thankfulness, that he receives from the poor folks among whom he ministers? As he stands or kneels by the bedside of an aged Christian man or woman, content to bear whatever God is pleased to send, of pain, or poverty, or sorrow,—does nothing come back to *him*,—is he the only one who gives,—is he the only one who teaches,—are there no precious fragments,—no precious lessons to be stored for his own use from that sight? Believe me, brethren,—if he is wise and true and humble,—if his ears and his eyes are open, if his conscience is tender,—if he is faithful in imparting, he is also richly blessed in receiving. I know no sight more truly edifying, none that sinks deeper into a thoughtful heart than a patient, pious, humble Christian deathbed. It is greatly so to every one that sees it: but if there be one to whom it conveys the tenderest and deepest instruction of all, it is to him who stands there as the commissioned minister of

Christ, carrying his Lord's warnings, carrying his Lord's comfort, uttering the due and true words which, by the Lord's blessing, minister grace unto the hearers. Do not think for a moment that he only is the teacher,—oh, no; he too, if he be wise, and humble, and earnest, is learning too, learning very deep, very sacred lessons,—lessons that he can never forget, lessons that sink deeper than hundreds of sermons,—do not imagine that he only is the giver; oh, no, he is receiving too,—fragments if you will, one thing here and one thing there, but fragments that he must gather up carefully, and lose none of them, which will be to himself a richer store than even the precious things and precious words which he is the appointed minister to carry and speak to them.

I might quote various other instances, brethren, in illustration of the same thought. I might urge how if he in the due exercise of his high office prays for his people, and speaks the words of blessing over them, their prayers and their blessings repay him,—baskets full of precious fragments,—to his own rich benefit,—prayers of hungry souls and poor, like armed angels round his door,—giving him back more than ever he gave. Or I might shew them how while he urges them to come to Holy Communion, and, as Christ's faithful priest, delivers to them the broken bread and the poured wine which their common Lord hath blessed, there comes

back to him, and not to him only but to all the faithful in Christ, the rich blessing of closer union with their Lord, closer union with each other, more sacred binding together of the whole Body of Christ, deeper and more comfortable assurance of that Divine and mysterious indwelling, by means of which we are strengthened and sealed to holiness while we remain on earth, and to salvation and glory in Heaven.

The particular branch of the subject, brethren, to which I am desired to draw the application of our thoughts to-day, is that of Sunday-schools: and we shall, I think, readily see that it connects itself easily and naturally with the reflections arising from this passage of Holy Scripture.

The Sunday-school in its theory occupies a most important place in our general system of religious training and education. I do not now speak so much of the weekly scholars, whose Sunday-school is but a part of their regular and continual work, as of those who, having left the weekly school, and having begun to go to work of various kinds, form, as every one who is aware of the state of our parishes well knows, the most anxious, and by no means the least important part of our people:—the young men and the young women, trained so far, and hitherto under the restraints of training, but now feeling themselves free

from these restraints, and tempted to indulge an independent temper, which may lead, if it be not wisely and kindly guided, into all manner of danger. There is a natural reaction against restraint. If hitherto they have been taken to church, there is a not unnatural tendency to wish to show independence by going to the chapel, or staying away from Divine service altogether; if hitherto they have been under various rules and orders, it is not to be wondered at if they are inclined to throw such things aside, and to follow their own ways, even though these ways are ways of danger and evil.

Now there is some good mixed with the evil and danger in all this. Provided that something can be done to keep the heart straight, to keep the young servant of God in the path of truth, soberness, and chastity, the sense of greater freedom and of greater independence of mind is a good rather than an evil. It makes a young man strong. He ought not always to be a child. He ought to learn to go on in strength of his own, and to be good in his place in Christ's Church, not because he is bidden, but because he understands his own duty, and is resolved in the strength of the Holy Spirit of grace to do it.

Now here is, I apprehend, the precise place and the precise object of the Sunday-school. Willing pupils,

kindly teachers. Willing pupils, desirous not to forget what they have learned before, and coming of their own good will; kindly teachers, men and women, rejoicing to give their time and trouble to so gracious and good a work. Willing pupils, kindly teachers: different classes coming to know one another well, and understand one another; laying the foundation of much mutual regard and kindness; some teaching, and some learning; but all doing God's work in their place in the Church, willingly, not of compulsion, carefully, and in earnest.

I cannot listen to those who undervalue our Sunday-schools. On the contrary, I believe that they are capable of being made of the greatest value; binding ranks together, giving occasion and opportunity for an immense amount of mutual confidence and good-will, helping the young people to steer their own courses right exactly at the time when they are tempted to give up the rudder altogether to passion and fancy—in freest and kindliest spirit joining together in God's work those whom social differences and differences of training and taste are apt to keep only too far asunder.

When I remember the case of an old friend and schoolfellow of my own who, as vicar of a large manufacturing town in the north of England, used to assemble his six hundred Sunday-school teachers for mutual conference and instruction, I cannot doubt that he was using

an instrument of the greatest possible value for the social and spiritual good of his people: an instrument which is in our hands too, brethren, if we learn by God's grace the skill and the strength to use it.

And do you think that if this great instrument were thus faithfully and wisely used, the benefits would be all on one side? Do you think that the Sunday-school *scholars* alone get good out of such a thing? No, believe me, while you teach, you learn; while you give, you receive; while you satisfy with the good food of sound and true knowledge and entertainment the souls of your scholars, you may gather, if you have the heart and skill to gather, baskets full of precious fragments for your own souls' support and nourishment: more, I venture to say, by far, if you be good and faithful than all the good things that you say and teach;—actual knowledge, clearness of thought, clearness of expression, skill of explanation, sympathy, condescension of mind to slowness and unreadiness of thought, command of temper, kindliness of manner,—all this, richly and constantly in yourselves, and more than this, love, confidence, kindness, gratitude, prayers, blessings, from those you teach.

Baskets full piled up, and running over. Baskets full of rich fragments from the Lord's bounty. A basket apiece.

And oh, brethren, that the Lord would give us grace to throw ourselves so faithfully, and so skilfully into our work, that we, who are the clergy, to whom the Lord has in the first place, given the food of His Most Holy Truth to minister it to His people, may distribute it faithfully, wisely, kindly to all, that all you who under the clergy help in the work, may in like manner, give your faithful, intelligent, dutiful, diligent aid to further it, and that our young people may be guided in these anxious and dangerous days, and in this critical time of their lives, by our joint, loving and skilful help and counsel.

And sure I am, that if we work so the blessing will come back richly upon ourselves, upon our Church and our country, baskets and baskets full of precious fragments—an united, kindly, willing, faithful Christian people.

Harvest

GENESIS viii.

20. *And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord: and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings upon the altar.*

21. *And the Lord smelled a sweet savour: and the Lord said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth: neither again will I smite any more every thing living as I have done.*

22. *While the earth remaineth seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*

THIS day, brethren, we are feeling the effect of the gracious promise which God thus made to Noah, when he came out of the ark, and offered the first sacrifice of the new world.

From that day to this, the return of day and night, of winter and summer, of cold and heat, has not been more regular and unfailing than the return of seed-time and harvest, the regular and unfailing blessing of God giving the kindly fruits of the earth as the promised reward of our labour in tilling the soil.

It has been perfectly regular and unfailing; yet, every year we are taught to remember how it all depends upon the immediate blessing of God. We do our work, and unless we do it diligently and skilfully there is no hope nor possibility of any harvest at all; but, work as we will, we depend upon God's rain, upon God's sun, upon God's blessing at every step and stage. We plough and prepare the land, but we cannot give it an atom of fertility. We sow the seed, but we cannot give it the smallest power to grow. We watch the blade, but we cannot bid the ear swell within the sheath, or the grain grow within the ear. We watch the ripening, but we cannot check the rains if they are excessive, or bring them if they are wanting, nor can we command the sun to come forth and ripen the corn, nor temper the winds so that they shall fan the crops as they change colour, and not beat down our hopes by laying them flat to decay upon the ground. We absolutely depend, and we feel most sensibly every year that we do absolutely depend upon the mercy and blessing of God in it all. Though, I say, we do our own best to labour, and though we trust to His ancient promise, yet year by year we feel, and I think in no year more sensibly than in this present year, how completely we depend upon God's continual and loving Providence.

And so, brethren, I have thought it good and right

to invite you to this solemn act of joint worship and praise, to testify the thankful gratitude with which we all acknowledge this fresh act of our merciful Father's tender love and care. I have asked the farmers and occupiers of land to join with us in this act of worship, for they are the first to feel the effect of God's blessing in harvest, which has enabled them to build up their corn-stacks, and store their barns, and strew their threshing-floors with the well-ripened grain. I have invited the labourers to join us, for they depend as directly and at least as certainly upon the blessing of God in harvest. The farmer might possibly weather a year of famine, if the earth were for a season to deny her fruits altogether and produce nothing. But what would the poor labourer do? He who lives from hand to mouth, and who if he loses his weekly wages loses all he has in the world to support himself and family?

I have invited the poor women who leaze in the fields, who, after the pattern of Naomi of old and Ruth the Moabitess, one of the mothers of the Lord Himself, follow the reapers, and pick up what the binder of the sheaves, or the kindly rake has allowed to lie on the ground, for they too, in the next place, eke out a scanty living from the bounty of the harvest-field. I have invited all who eat bread, and share in the wonderful

mercy which year by year gives "seed to the sower and bread to the eater," to join with us in offering our hearty tribute of prayer and praise and thanksgiving, that we may all lift up our voices together in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, for the great mercy once again vouchsafed to us in the harvest which we have just gathered; and I have suggested to any who desire to make a thank-offering to God, in acknowledgment of His mercy, that any gifts put in the alms-boxes at the Church-doors, shall be devoted to the good of our sick and suffering brethren in the Ryde Infirmary.

But, brethren, the Holy Scriptures, while they often refer to the yearly harvest as a season of joy and thankfulness, yet, as I have no doubt you all know, do also continually apply it to teach us a great and solemn spiritual lesson. Over and over again in the Bible, the harvest, at the close of the year's labour, is made to remind us of the judgment-day, which shall bring the long labour of God on this earth to its close. The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels: so we read in the explanation of the parable of the tares and the wheat, in the 13th of St. Matthew. And again in the Book of the Revelation of St. John: "And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time has come for thee to

reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped."

Year then by year, as we thank God for giving us harvest, for allowing us to look forward to the supply of our wants and those of our families for the approaching winter, the language of Holy Scripture, so often repeated, warns us to see in the corn harvest gathered in our own fields, an emblem and token of what shall be one day upon the earth, when the Lord Himself shall return in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, and shall sit upon the throne of His glory to judge both the quick and the dead.

That day will come suddenly; as suddenly, you know, as the flashes of the lightning came but a few evenings since to warn us of that suddenness.

The sign of the Son of Man—the Cross—shall appear in the air, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail when they see Him whom their sins have pierced.

And before Him shall be gathered all nations: a mighty harvest! Those who are still alive upon the earth shall flock, by some Divine summons, as the eagles flock to the body, to meet Him. And the graves shall give up their dead. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the millions that have died, those whose remains lie in our graveyards, or on fields of deadly

battle, in pits of pestilence, in the sea; those who shall have died recently and their memory still be lingering on the earth, and those whose name has long since been utterly forgotten among men, and whose dust has mingled altogether with the soil of the earth, all in that moment shall hear that awful trumpet blast, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead awake, and stand, a mighty army which no man can number, in the presence of the Judge.

We do not know when it will be, nor where. But we shall be there. We and our families of all past generations, and our children, and may be our children's children, to many a distant future generation: they whose souls are waiting in the tranquil Paradise of God, waiting with God, in His Peace, and in His Presence; and those, too, whose souls are in the chains and darkness of the lost angels, and the traitor Judas; all will be there together, to receive their doom for all things done in the body.

In that awful moment they shall be changed. The living suddenly changed from corruptible to incorruptible. The dead, joined once more to their bodies; but those bodies now rendered immortal, for good or for evil.

The just in Christ with bodies glorious, bright, such as the Lord wore in His Transfiguration on Mount

Tabor, and such as He ascended with into heaven from the Mount of Olives.

The lost—I know not what their bodies will be like, but I know from the words of Holy Scripture that they shall awake from the dust of the earth to shame and everlasting contempt; and I suppose it not unlikely that their bodies, risen from the grave and made immortal, will carry on them for ever the signs and tokens of the foul sins, whatever they be, that have led to their miserable ruin, because they did not repent of them before they died!

An exceeding great army—the men of every age of the world, and of every colour; those who have lived and died in savage ignorance, and those who have known better; patriarchs and prophets and saints under the old Law, and we, brethren, the least of whom being in the kingdom of heaven, is in privilege and the power of holy obedience greater than they.

We shall be there. Do not doubt it, brethren, you and I shall be there; not lost in the countless multitude, not overlooked among the many millions, but each one of us as clear and plain before the eyes of the Most High God in judgment as if we stood at the bar alone, like a man accused in an earthly court of trial. Indeed, I suppose that the place of waiting in which our souls shall pass the time that intervenes between death and

judgment, and the very bodies in which we spring into immortality as we rise from our graves, will sufficiently show us whether our place is to be on the Judge's right hand, among those who are to be for ever the blessed of His Father, or, alas! (if it should so be with any of us) on the left hand, among the cursed, bidden to depart into everlasting fire.

Brethren, does any one of you doubt the truth of what I say? Does any one doubt that what I have said is according to the plain and clear teaching of the Bible? No; I will venture to say that none doubts it. But do we not forget it? Do we not go on, month after month and year after year, living as if it were not true?—neglecting, disobeying, sinning, as if death would never come upon us, and make repentance impossible; and as if, after death, there were no such thing as a judgment to come, and a future life to last for ever, and a doom of joy or sorrow unspeakable before us, according as we die in the faith and fear of God, repentant of our sins, and trusting in Christ for our forgiveness and repentance, or the reverse?

Then, God be praised, Who, giving us His yearly blessing of a bountiful harvest, and making our hearts glad with the fruits of the earth, charges that harvest and those fruits with this sacred lesson: Who bids us see, when the reaper goes into the field and cuts the

corn, a likeness of the angel sent to finish the long tillage of God, making short work of all that remain upon the earth: Who bids us see, in the loaded waggon and the high-piled sheaves, a likeness of the happy work of the angels gathering and carrying home the accepted souls: Who bids us see, in the stored barn, a likeness of the garner of God, the happy heavens where the souls who depart hence in the faith and fear of God are received to the everlasting joy of the Lord; but Who bids us not forget that tares (I wish that word were not translated tares, for tares, as you know, are cultivated as useful plants), weeds, charlock, poisonous herbs, often grow up among the healthy corn, and that He lets them all grow together for the present, intending, when the harvest comes, to separate them for ever, and, gathering the good grain into His barn, to bind the weeds in bundles to burn them.

O brethren, meeting as we meet to-night (and most thankful am I to see so large a number of our neighbours met) to thank God for our harvest, let us lay to our heart, amid our joy, the solemn lesson of our harvest. It is a lesson addressed to every single soul among us. Shall Christ, when He comes in judgment, find you, find me, find each one ready, ripe as yonder ripened sheaf, or the ruddy fruits with which we innocently deck our church, to signify His mercy, and to warn us of His

judgment? Are we living now in such a manner as to be able to turn cheerfully to Him and say, "O God, Thou knowest my sins, my heavy and often-repeated sins, and my weakness which constantly leads me into more sin, but Thou knowest also that I do most earnestly repent and desire to repent, that I do put my whole trust and confidence in Thy mercy in Christ, that my heart seeks Thee constantly in prayer, and desires nothing so much or so ardently as to live in Thy strength and to die in Thy favour."

Is this, I say, the very, very truth of our inmost hearts, so that if God should bid His angel, as a reaper, cut us down to-day or to-morrow, we could resign our souls cheerfully, faithfully, into His Almighty and most merciful hands? If so, then may we rejoice in full and double joy in our harvest worship, thankful for the temporal blessing, and opening our hearts, with awed cheerfulness, to the spiritual lesson.

But, O brethren, be not hasty to conclude that it is so with you. Believe me, those who are really nearest to God are commonly those who are least aware of their own happy place, because they are the humblest, and the most tender in conscience, and most alive to their sinfulness, and to the aggravation and badness of their sins. Ordinarily speaking, there can hardly be a worse sign of a man or woman than that they feel perfectly

safe of their own salvation; and I am sure that there is no state so terrible and shocking as that of a man or woman who, feeling perfectly safe of their salvation, sin without fear, thinking that sin is no sin in them.

Remember St. Paul. Though great as the greatest of the Apostles, though he was converted by miracle, and laboured more abundantly than all the Twelve, yet how does he speak of himself? "Not as though," he says, "I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded."

This is the mind for earnest, humble, faithful Christian people.

So, pressing on towards our mark, daily walking as in the sight of God, praying to be kept from sin, confessing and repenting of such sins as still from our weakness we fall into—daily making our peace with God, and keeping His holy law and will before our eyes—we may humbly trust that we are growing on before Him to a certain ripeness not our own, nor of our own making;

that, even while we dare not be sure of ourselves, or count ourselves to have apprehended, He is gradually making us fit, under His most Holy Spirit of grace and strength, to be received, as the good grain secretly ripened, into His holy heaven, the sacred garner of the harvest of the Most High God.

Meanwhile, let us praise and bless God for the loving mercy wherewith He has once more blest our fields with abundance; and let our grateful hearts, turning all the more to Him in such true repentance and faith, overflow with kindness and brotherly love to one another; and let us pray, that as we meet together this evening to celebrate an earthly harvest, so none may be missing from our company, not one found faithless, and *bound* for the terrible burning, in the great Day of the Lord, the heavenly harvest.

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

REVELATION xix.

6. *And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*
7. *Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.*
8. *And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.*
9. *And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.*

TO-DAY is the Festival of *All-Saints*, which is, in some respects, one of the most tender and touching of all the festivals of the Christian year.

We do not speak to-day immediately of our dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him belong all the sacred feasts that mark the rest of the year—His Birth, His Circumcision, His Epiphany, His Death, His Resurrection, His Ascension.

To-day we think of our brethren in Christ, of that

mighty army of the redeemed and faithful who are bought and saved by His precious Blood. To-day we think of the multitude of those who in all time have lived, are living, and shall live in the faith and fear of God, and dying therein, or found therein at the last without dying, shall be saved in Christ at the last.

It is a lofty and a touching thought—lofty, because in the midst of the cares and troubles, and various business and interest of our lives here, it lifts us up to think of the innumerable hosts of the souls of the faithful who, having passed through the waves of this troublesome world, are now safely anchored in the paradise of God—very touching, because in that happy host which of us is there who does not hope that he can number dear friends of his own, dear Christian friends who have been called away from his side on earth, but are still bound to him by the holiest and closest of all ties, ties closer than those of blood, or earthly affection and love—the everlasting membership in the Body of Christ, and the blessed indwelling for ever and ever of the Holy Spirit of God?

The verses which I have read to you as the text, and which were read in the second Lesson for this evening's service, form part of that great vision which you will find in the nineteenth chapter of the Book of the Revelation, in which the whole body of the redeemed, all the

saints of God, were seen by the beloved Apostle gathered together in heaven, to sing the great Song of Alleluia.

It is called the Marriage of the Lamb, and you will observe, brethren, that the language of the whole passage is in accordance with that expression. "The Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; and the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."

Now, who is the Lamb of this vision? None can doubt for a moment; it is our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And who is the wife? There is equally no doubt it is the Church of Christ. And what is the fine linen in which the Church is dressed in her glorious marriage, never to be divided, with her Lord? It is the righteousness, the righteous deeds the original text says, of the saints.

But then again, we read of the marriage supper of the Lamb, and blessed are they which are admitted to partake of it? Who then are the guests of the marriage-supper? They are, no doubt, God's saints; God's faithful people; the very same, now regarded one by one as guests of the marriage supper, who just before, regarded collectively, were spoken of as being the Bride of the

Lamb, and their righteous deeds constituting the brightness of her clothing.

Now, I beg you to observe this point particularly, brethren, for it is one which will help us materially to understand, not this Scripture only, but many others. God's people are looked at in two ways: first, as forming a great body, the Body of Christ, the Church. In this light, the whole Church is the Bride of the Lamb; secondly, as a great multitude of separate believers, regarded now as guests at the great marriage supper of their Lord.

Now, bearing this in mind, think for a few moments of the very great number of passages in the New Testament, in the Gospels and Epistles, in which this sort of language is used. St. Paul speaks to the Corinthians of presenting the Church as a chaste virgin to Christ. In other passages of the Revelation of St. John, the Church is called the Bride, the Lamb's wife. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul speaks at length about the mystery of Christ and His Church, likening it to a marriage; and representing Christ as sanctifying and cleansing it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing: but that it should be holy and without blemish.

There are some of the passages in which Holy Scrip-

ture in other places uses the same sort of language as we read in the text, speaking of the Church altogether, not now one by one, but altogether to a bride, the Bride of Christ; according to that beautiful forty-fifth Psalm, which, speaking of the marriage of the king, says as you remember, "Upon Thy right hand did stand the queen in vesture of gold, wrought about with divers colours. The king's daughter is all glorious within, her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework; the virgins that be her fellows shall bear her company, and shall be brought unto Thee." Thus, I say, Scripture speaks in many places. The Church of God, the One, Single, Holy, Catholic Church of God, is the espoused Bride of Christ; and at the last, as seen in the vision of the Beloved Apostle, shall be presented by Christ to Christ, by God to God, holy, in white apparel, which is the righteousness of her saints, to reign with Him, as a queen for ever and ever.

But, on the other hand, there are also a great many passages in which the other part of the vision finds its likeness; in which Christian people, now regarded one by one, are spoken of as guests at the marriage feast of the king. You remember well the parables, occurring more than once, of the king who made a marriage for his son, and bade many, and how with one consent they

began to make excuse. You remember the feast at which one miserable man is represented as coming in without a wedding-garment,—you remember the blessedness pronounced on those who should eat and drink in the kingdom of God.

So it is: both parts of this sacred vision have their full counterpart in other portions of Holy Scripture. On the one hand, we find many passages in which the whole Church together is spoken of as the Bride of Christ, the Queen who is to reign by the King's side in heaven: on the other, there is no lack of passages which speak of the great marriage-feast at which Christian people, now regarded one by one, are to sit down to meat in the kingdom of heaven, received to the marriage-supper of the King, each in his own wedding-garment of repentance and faith.

Now, brethren, when passing from the sublime imagery of the Apostle, and the blessed vision that was presented to him in the spirit in the Island of Patmos, we come down to ourselves and to the lessons which this vision teaches us, I most earnestly beg you to remember both the things which I have been explaining to you and the meaning of them: both the vision and the interpretation thereof.

As the Church is represented, on the one hand, as being one, the Bride of Christ, the Wife of the Lamb,

who hath made herself ready, so we must take great care to keep in the Church, to cling to the unity of the Church, lest we should have no part nor portion in the unspeakable blessedness of the Bride of Christ.

As, on the other hand, the Christian people are represented as being received one by one to the marriage-feast of the Lamb, so we must remember that, besides clinging to the Church of God, and forming part of the oneness of the queenly Bride of Christ, we must ourselves be fit guests for that heavenly feast, and live, and die, brethren, with that clean and white array, that wedding-garment of repentance,—true, unfeigned, earnest repentance, and faith, thorough, real, holy faith—which alone can give us admission to it.

Now, I have one very serious word to say to you, my dear brethren, on this: perhaps, as I have been speaking about the vision of the heavenly marriage-feast, the thought of it may have already occurred to some of your minds.

The Holy Communion is by Christ made the type of that heavenly marriage-feast.

The Holy Communion is the special rite which binds the Church continually into *one*, which, while it feeds the single souls of those who duly partake of it, unites together, in the blessed Unity of the Holy Spirit, the whole Body of Christ in all its members, whether

they be still living upon the earth, and discharging for a while longer the work assigned to them, or waiting in Paradise for the final judgment which is to give them, with their risen and glorified bodies, full entrance into the everlasting joy of their Lord.

We celebrated the Holy Communion this morning. We, according to the last command of our dear Lord, took and ate, in spirit, of His Body, and drank, in sacrament, of His Blood. We rehearsed on earth, in this church, at yonder table, the Marriage-Feast of the Lord as seen by the Apostle St. John in the Revelation. We ate and drank at His Table: we sang the song of the angels and archangels, and all the company of Heaven. We did, in the sight of men and angels, publish the Lord's death and its glorious and saving efficacy once more ere He come.

But where were the multitudes? Where were the thronging crowds of earnest Christians who hope, no doubt, to be admitted to the heavenly Marriage-Feast in Heaven? I believe that fifty-five of us met at Communion this morning. Where were the rest of the grown people? of those who are old enough to be invited and to come to the altar? Some, no doubt, went away to the chapel, and while they did mean, I know, to serve God in Christ in their own hearts, did their best to break that blessed unity of the Church, which is

represented in the vision by the Bride of the Lamb. Many were at Church for the prayers, but left it before we went to Holy Communion. Many stayed away from both: some, I will not doubt, with good reason of health or other necessity, but many without. Oh, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is it not melancholy to think that so many of us thus forgetting, and neglecting, or it may be despising the blessed gift of God, Who bids us in this way rehearse the sacred Marriage-Feast of Heaven upon the earth, bind ourselves more and more closely in the great and holy Body of Christ, and feed our souls with the most sacred food of His spiritual Flesh and Blood?

Believe me, there is no moment in our lives when we are so near to our Lord, no moment when we are so close to all those who are asleep in the Lord, as when we meet to partake of that most holy food in the Lord's Supper.

And so, no day in all the Christian year more fit for Communion than *All-Saints' Day*, and none in which we may feel ourselves, in Christ, nearer and closer to those whom we have lost upon the earth than this day.

Where are they now? those whom we have known and loved, and been called to part with for a time? Parents, children, brothers, sisters, dear Christian friends? We have laid their bodies, in tearful faith, in the grave,

and there we know they will decay and turn to their earth again, till the last trumpet wakens them up in a moment and in the twinkling of an eye to immortal life. But where are their souls? Separate, we know, from their bodies: but living still: living, conscious, happy: not asleep, not unaware, it may be, of some things at least which may be passing upon the earth: safe in God's guarded paradise; safe in the presence of God, looking forward with no doubtful, or uncertain prospect, to the day when they and we shall stand together before the judgment seat of Christ to receive our everlasting doom. We shall go to them: very soon, it may be, some of us; all, before long; and our bodies too, it is probable, our friends will lay with tears and pardonable sorrow in the consecrated earth, as we have laid the bodies of those who went before us. But we, our souls, that is ourselves, shall pass to the place of souls. God grant it be to the place of the happy souls, the paradise of the penitent and faithful; not to the chains and darkness of those who can only look fearfully on to the fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.

And shall we, spared at present, spared for we know not how long, spared for no other purpose but that we should make the calling and election sure with which God has been pleased to call and choose us,—shall we go on shutting our eyes to the great things which are

before us, and living as if they were merely fables? We are all more or less in need of rousing. We easily fall asleep. The best need to bestir themselves every day, and by watching and praying to keep their hearts alive to God and the coming world. But if they too need it, what shall we say of the others? Do not many seem to be quite asleep? dead asleep? as if there were no death, no resurrection, no judgment, no Judge to come down from Heaven, no eternal Heaven, no eternal Hell! as if the world were indeed all: and when men breathed their last breath on the earth they were indeed *no more.*

Then, as I said, the thought of *All-Saints* is a lofty and an elevating thought. We know, and we rejoice to know, that the souls of the dead,—the souls of those who have died in repentance and faith,—are in the hands of God. We delight to think of them. We do not grieve, as men without hope or faith, if those who are very near and dear to us are called away from our side to join them. We delight to think that if our company grows thinner upon earth, our store in Paradise grows richer and fuller. We learn to lift our hearts above these lower things; and to live, at least in some degree, in the higher world; where God is, and the good angels, and the spirits of the just.

O brethren, do not shrink from thinking of them.

Rather welcome the remembrance; and if it be touching and tender to think of them whom you have lost, do not shrink from reflecting that in the presence and under the care of God their place is in the Paradise of happy souls. So may we learn and not forget the lesson of the way by which we are to join them,—the sure and certain and unfailing way.

Christ is the Way. And repenting of our sins, and putting our whole trust in His mercy for pardon and acceptance, we shall not fail in our own due time to reach that happy place where He led the soul of the penitent thief on the Crucifixion day, and where we believe the souls of the faithful, now delivered from the burthen of the flesh, wait in joy and felicity for the final triumph of the Judgment-Day.

The Last Judgment

ST. MATTHEW XXV.

31. *When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory.*
32. *And before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall divide them from one another, as a shepherd dividing his sheep from the goats.*
33. *And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, and the goats on His left.*

WHEN the eleven Apostles saw the Lord ascend into Heaven from the high ground which lies between Jerusalem and Bethany, and watched Him rise higher and higher, till at last a cloud received Him out of their sight, you will no doubt remember that there suddenly stood by them two men in white apparel, who also said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus who is taken up from you into Heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven."

From that day forth the Church of God has gone on, waiting, as the Apostle expresses it,—waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There have been times when that coming seemed to be drawing very near. It has often happened that men, fancying that they had obtained some insight into the counsels of God, have prophesied that in a particular year the Lord would return in Judgment, and this world come to an end. And over and over again, in the history of the Church, these prophecies have caused great consternation and alarm in proportion as they have been widely believed, and sometimes they have seemed to turn men to God with an unusual fervour of faith and prayer. But time after time the appointed year has gone by,—things have gone on as usual, and the sudden fervour has cooled down again just as suddenly as it rose, and men have been none the better, perhaps a good deal the worse, for having got back again into their old ways, and learned to despise the fear which seemed to shake their souls for a time.

The Church of God has never given heed to these predictions. They have been the foolish and irregular outbreaks of hot-brained and enthusiastic men; but the Church of God has given them no countenance. The Church of God goes on year after year announcing the advent that is coming; but she knows not when. It is certainly coming: certainly coming nearer every year: but God has given no sign by which men shall be able to fix the date, or search into His counsels. "Of that

day and of that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but the Father only."

Remember, brethren, in case any one should come and tell you in a particular year, or at some time that he specifies, Christ is coming, remember that he certainly is deceiving you. That day is indeed coming,—very soon it may be,—may be not for a thousand years; but it is not given any mortal man—no, nor to the angels in Heaven—to know when it is to come.

Then, on the other hand, there have always been men such as the Apostle St. Peter speaks of in his second Epistle, mockers, men walking after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" What has become of the prophecy that He would return to judge? "For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things remain as they were from the beginning of the world." But between the foolish prophets, on the one side, and the mocking sinners on the other, the Church of God has gone on, anxiously but soberly giving her annual Advent warning—blowing, so to say, every winter her Advent trumpet, bidding those who have ears to hear prepare themselves for the inevitable day when the *Son of Man*, the blessed Son of Man, who can be touched with the feeling of the infirmities of man, shall assuredly return in judgment.

When we turn to the Book of God in order to learn

what particulars are revealed to us respecting that awful coming,—the first thing that strikes us is its *suddenness*. Ye yourselves know, says St. Paul to the Thessalonians, that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night. Therefore be ye ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh. At midnight the cry arose, while they all slumbered and slept, Behold the bridegroom cometh! When they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. As the lightning shineth out of the one part under heaven unto the other part under heaven, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.

So, brethren, the Scripture speaks, not in these places only, but in a multitude of others also, respecting the suddenness of the return of Christ to judgment.

How then shall He come?

"Behold He cometh with clouds," says St. John in the Book of the Revelation—even as the prophet Daniel saw Him coming in the clouds of heaven. He shall come in like manner as the Apostles saw Him depart, till His lessening figure was lost to their sight in the clouds.

His sign, that is the sign of the Cross, shall appear in the Heavens.

At the sight of it all the tribes of the earth shall mourn: every one shall see Him, and they also that

pierced Him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him.

He shall come with power and great glory, with His angels (Matt. xvi. 27), with all His holy angels (xxv. 31), His mighty angels (2 Thess. i. 7), and surrounded by ten thousands of His saints (Jude 14). He shall send His angels, with a great sound of a trumpet. At that terrible blast, all the dead in all the world, from graveyard, from pit, from battle-field, from land and sea, shall spring to life in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,—bone to his bone, sinew and flesh upon them, and the skin covering them above, and breath breathed once more, as at the first, into their nostrils: an exceeding great army.

And they shall all be gathered,—from the east and west, from the north and from the south, to stand before the Lord, when the throne of His glory is set, and He is come to judge the world, the quick and the dead,—those who have been dead for thousands of years, and those who are still alive and remaining upon earth,—to judge white men and black men, to judge heathens and Christians, to judge Dissenters and Churchmen, to judge all according to their several opportunities in perfect righteousness.

These, brethren, are some of particulars relating to that great and most awful day, which are revealed to us

in Holy Scripture. When it will be we know not: where it will be we know not. It must suffice for us that it will be as sudden as the lightning flash, and that wherever on the round world it is, we shall be there as certainly as the eagles gather to the fallen carcase.

But we must trace still further the Divine Words, which tell us of the proceedings of that great day.

He shall separate them one from another—into two great companies—just as an Eastern shepherd divideth His sheep from the goats.

Observe, there shall be only two companies—the saved and the lost. No middle place: no place for those who might hope to find themselves *average* people, neither particularly faithful, nor particularly unfaithful:—only two companies, with a mighty chasm between them—the lowest of the blessed company of those that are received inexpressibly more blessed than the first of those that are excluded. I would rather be a doorkeeper, says David, in the house of my God than dwell in the tent of ungodliness. Oh, that I were the least in the Kingdom of God,—unworthy though I be to be called His son, yet made as one of His hired servants, rather than that I were left to the misery and ruin of the impenitent, to feed on the husks that the swine eat, with none of the daily bread of grace, which God supplies at His own children's table!

"Then shall the king say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked and ye clothed Me. I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred and fed Thee, or thirsty and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger and took Thee in? or naked and clothed Thee? or when saw we Thee sick or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me. Then shall He say also unto them on His left hand; Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked and ye clothed Me not: sick and in prison, and ye visited Me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee? Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye

did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not unto Me."

Oh, brethren, what an astonishing, what an awful Scripture this is! Can we not conceive how, when we stand before that judgment-seat, our consciences will be full of all manner of sad recollections of sin, remembering how we have broken this and that commandment, hoping that this and that palliation may be admitted for our forgiveness,—and behold, even before the question of our actual offences committed is opened at all, before one breach of one Commandment is touched upon,—behold, we are condemned for our *omissions!* Christ was with us, among us, always with us in His poor people, and we did not do all we could for them when we had time!

I do not know how it may strike you, brethren,—to me it appears inexpressibly awful to think how utterly surprised and overwhelmed the guilty are represented as being in this vision of the judgment. Not one word of all they feared; not one word of their disobedience to their parents, of their murders, and their murderous malice, of their adulteries and carnal lusts, of their thefts and covetings. It does not *come* to that. They are lost for their omissions! lost for things which they never thought of, which they are utterly astonished, utterly overwhelmed to hear of!

And so, in some sort, with the just. They too are represented as completely, overpoweringly surprised to hear the Judge's sentence. Lord, when was it? when could it be? When did we ever see Thee in hunger, athirst, or cold, in nakedness, in sickness or prison, and ministered unto Thee? Oh, how little we knew, all the time that we lived, how Thou wert watching and noting down all those little things that seemed to us as nothing,—things that passed by in the ordinary way of our daily life, and were totally forgotten! Wert Thou, Thou Thyself in those poor men and women whom we felt sorry for and helped, in those poor children whom we tried to teach and guide, wert Thou Thyself so close to us all that time. Oh, how little we thought it! How anxiously we would have worked for Thee if we had but known it! Blessed be Thy infinite mercy who givest our poor doings such wonderful, such Divine reward!

Brethren, there is one thought arising out of the things which I have been saying, which I should like to put before you, before I conclude. It is this. The judgment will be very different from an earthly judgment. There will be no witnesses, no counsellors, no examination. There will be no selection of particular charges against us,—then for the first time to be brought up, proved, and punished. Nothing at all like that. The judgment is going on *now*, every day and every hour our

hearts lie open before God, and as we obey or disobey, as we pray or refrain from praying, as we utter bad words or good ones, as we let our thoughts run to sin, or check them and turn them towards God and Heaven, the judgment gathers round us. If we are living carelessly and thinking little about God and Christ, the shadows of judgment are deepening round about us. If we die so,—not repenting of our sins, nor turning to God in faith, the final judgment will only pronounce what will have settled itself before, what is, indeed settling itself every day, settling itself for good or evil every day that we live.

The judgment is going on *now*:—going on, I say, not finished: going on as long as we live, never to be finished till we die.

Every day furnishes more and more materials for it, and I beg you to observe, from what I have already said, that we can only very imperfectly estimate how God is judging us all this time. If your trial, or mine, my brother, were to be concluded this night, I apprehend that we should be able to form but an imperfect idea of the judgment which has been gathering round us for innumerable acts, and words and thoughts which we have little thought of at the time, and wholly forgotten afterwards.

The judgment, as I said, is going on *now*, and there is

only one way, *only one way* of obtaining well-founded comfort in thinking of it, and that is, by *living in faith*, by constantly praying to God to pardon not only the sins which we know and confess, but our secret sins also, which we do not know or have forgotten,—by endeavouring every day to keep the judgment in mind, and to render to God our true obedience and devotion.

If we be unfaithful, impenitent, careless, the judgment is even now growing deeper and more deadly round us, —though even then, if we will repent and turn to God, we may by His great mercy be yet received in Christ. So long as we live, we may be sure that He spares us to repent if we will.

But if we live in faith, constantly laying our sins before Him, and earnestly seeking His pardon and grace, then—be the end sooner or later, be it to-morrow or a thousand years hence—there is no judgment to be dreaded. God loveth His own, who cry day and night unto Him. God loveth His own sons in Christ, who live and die in His faith and fear. God will surely give the blessing of Eternal Life to those who continually wipe out the record of judgment by continual repentance, who live in the Spirit, and die in Christ.

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